Commentary
May 2006

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Books in Review
Michael J. Lewis • Roger Kaplan • Clifford Orwin
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Commentary®

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Commentary
May 2006

Letters from Readers

Polarized America?

To the Editor:

James Q. Wilson disputes my assertion (along with Samuel Abrams and Jeremy Pope) in *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (2005) that the polarization evident in the nation's political class has only a faint reflection in the public at large ["How Divided Are We?," February]. As a longtime admirer of Mr. Wilson's work, I am naturally concerned when his take on an issue differs from mine, but I believe that his criticisms are the result of a misunderstanding.

Mr. Wilson discounts our finding that policy differences between voters in so-called red (Republican) and blue (Democratic) states are really quite small, commenting that "inferring the views of individual citizens from the gross results of presidential balloting is a questionable procedure." Indeed it is, which is why we explicitly avoided it.

We offered detailed analyses of the policy views expressed by voters in 2000 and 2004, and found (contrary to the conclusions of pundits like Garry Wills, Maureen Dowd, and others) surprisingly small differences between the denizens of the blue and the red states. As we emphasize repeatedly, people's *choices* (as expressed, say, in presidential balloting) can be polarized even while their *positions* on issues are not. Moreover, other studies find little evidence of growing polarization no matter how one slices and dices the population—affluent/poor,white/black/brown, old/young, male/female, well educated/less educated, and so on.

Like many before him, Mr. Wilson seems to confuse partisan *sorting* with polarization. The Democrats have largely shed their conservative Southern wing, and Republicans have largely shed their liberal "Rockefeller" wing. As a result, the parties are more distinctive even as the aggregate distribution of ideology and stances on issues among the citizenry remains much the same as in the past.

Mr. Wilson also criticizes our analysis of Americans' views on the specific matter of abortion. He notes that "70 percent of those who thought abortion should always be legal voted for Al Gore or John Kerry, while over 70 percent of those who thought it should always be illegal voted for George Bush." True enough, but he does not mention that Gallup repeatedly finds a majority of the American people placing themselves between such polar categories; they think abortion should be "legal only under certain circumstances." Even if we focus on avowed partisans, in 2005 only 30 percent of Democrats thought abortion should always be legal, and fewer than 30 percent of Republicans thought it should always be illegal.

One can always question the accuracy of a particular survey, but the cumulative weight of the evidence on abortion is overwhelming. Contrary to the wishes of activists on both sides, the American people prefer a middle ground.

I share Mr. Wilson's concern about the potentially harmful consequences of polarization. But I remain convinced that if Americans are offered competent political candidates with problem-solving orientations, the shallow popular roots of polarization will be exposed for all to see.

Morris P. Fiorina
Stanford University
Stanford, California

To the Editor:

As one of the scholars criticized by James Q. Wilson for thinking that polarization "is almost entirely confined to a small number of political elites and members of Congress," I feel that I need to correct some logical slippage in his article. Mr. Wilson should have more clearly distinguished

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between what political scientists call attitudinal polarization and party sorting.

Attitudinal polarization is when the public is more divided on issues than it has been in the past. A greater degree of partisan sorting, by contrast, means that the people who identify and vote for a particular party are more likely to share the stated views of that party.

Mr. Wilson writes that polarization consists of "intense commitment to a candidate, a culture, or an ideology that sets people in one group definitively apart from people in another, rival group." This, he feels, has "spread beyond the political elites to influence the opinions and attitudes of ordinary Americans" and "assumed the form of a culture war." What concerns him is clearly attitudinal polarization.

But the examples he brings to support his thesis—like data showing that as history marches on, Presidents are less likely to be approved of by people from the other party, or the fact that opponents of abortion are more likely to be Republicans and supporters more likely to be Democrats than in the past—are evidence only of sorting according to party. No scholar I know of disputes that this has occurred, but most scholars also agree that polarization on issues is not widespread.

Will party sorting or the existence of politically segmented media eventually lead to attitudinal polarization? The jury is still out.

JOHN H. EVANS
University of California
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson makes a thoughtful case that significant numbers of Americans regard people with whom they disagree as not only wrong but criminally wrong. I wonder, though.

Elections and polls consistently show that the overwhelming majority of Americans support moderate political positions, and are willing to listen and learn. Hillary Clinton, who once famously spoke of a vast right-wing conspiracy in this country, went on to get herself elected to the Senate, where she has played by the rules and, flying in the face of her party's core constituency, has consistently maintained that the invasion of Iraq was appropriate. One may suspect her motives, but the fact that she was compelled to succeed within the establishment rather than fail outside, while Howard Dean was exiled to guard duty in the Democrats' junkyard, is evidence of healthy depolarizing forces in our society. Even that odd political event, the election of middle-of-the-road Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger in contentious California, attests that the American genius for moderation is healthy and at work.

WALTER SCHIMMERLING
Arlington, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson seems worried about dissent and diversity when it comes to our foreign and defense policy. He concludes his essay by warning that "polarization is a force that can defeat us."

But the public expression of diverse opinions on any topic, including national security, is valuable and necessary. It helps policymakers come up with new and better ideas. The role of a loyal opposition is to present such ideas, as well as better ways of carrying out policies supported by a consensus.

Ironically, in spite of the very real differences between the two political parties that Mr. Wilson brings out so well, the Democrats have failed in their main responsibility to present new and viable alternatives to Republican policies.

BRUCE BRAGER
Arlington, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson is correct that political debate in this country is often acrimonious and unproductive. The reasons he cites for this division are certainly valid, but he misses the main, underlying cause.

Many of today's leaders are still fighting the culture wars of the late 1960's. The next generation of leaders will be much less inclined to debate hotly about issues like abortion and gay rights. Future generations will be much more inclined to seek practical solutions, not deeply ideological ones, to the country's problems.

Most younger Democrats have grown up with a greater appreciation for the bottom line and for pragmatism. They still may fight for more entitlements than Republicans, but they realize that programs like welfare must be held accountable financially. Likewise, most younger Republicans are a great deal more socially liberal than their parents, having been exposed through television and the Internet to a broader spectrum of humanity than they would otherwise have known. As I see it, polarization will recede as the electorate regresses toward socially liberal, fiscally conservative centrists who will increasingly find a consensus on many issues.

GARY LAZARSKI
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

We believe that the evidence clearly supports James Q. Wilson's conclusion that polarization in America has grown, and not only among elites but also among ordinary citizens. We agree that the primary cause of polarization is the changing politics in Congress, in particular the increased ideological homogeneity within both major parties.

As Mr. Wilson and others have noted, in the immediate postwar decades, both the Democratic and Republican parties had in their ranks significant numbers of ambitious politicians whose policy preferences were out of sync with the mainstream of their party. Such "partisan misfits" were nevertheless able to pursue successful political careers in Congress—until the last couple of decades. Our own research confirms that during the 1980's, the number of "moderate" and "cross-pressured" members of Congress began to decline, in both parties and in both chambers. Some changed their behavior to vote with their party's mainstream, others switched over to the party that was a better ideological fit, and still others were replaced in primaries or elections by more partisan candidates. The trend accelerated in the 1990's, and today liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats have all but disappeared from Capitol Hill.

Party leaders and their

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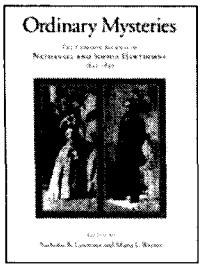
Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society



Ordinary Mysteries: The Common Journal of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne, 1842-1843

Nicholas R. Lawrence and Marta L. Werner

From the summer of 1842 through the fall of 1843, Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne kept a common journal of their daily lives in a notebook currently housed in the Pierpont Morgan Library. Intended solely for their own eyes, the journal records the ordinary events and activities that occupied the Hawthornes as newlyweds: walks through the countryside around Concord, appraisals of their new home, encounters with neighbors (among them Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau), descriptions of the weather and the changing seasons—all material that Hawthorne would later draw on for the preface to his second collection of tales, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846). Its most persistent note, however, is the mutual expression of marital happiness. For over a century the journal has been available in published form only as a mutilated text, edited initially by Sophia, who divorced Nathaniel's entries from her own and presented them as extracts from his solo notebooks. *Ordinary Mysteries* makes available for the first time a full facsimile edition of the journal, preserving the interplay of the Hawthorne's collaboration and revealing the censorship executed by Sophia on the manuscript after Nathaniel's death.

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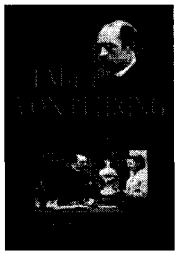

Emil von Behring
Infectious Disease, Immunology, Serum Therapy

Derek S. Linton

In 1901 Emil von Behring received the first Nobel Prize in medicine for serum therapy against diphtheria, a disease that killed thousands of infants annually. Diphtheria serum was the first major cure of the bacteriological era and its development generated novel procedures for testing, standardizing, and regulating drugs. Since the introduction of antibiotics Behring and his work have largely been forgotten. In the first English-language scientific biography of Behring, Derek S. Linton emphasizes Behring's seminal contributions to the study of infectious diseases, the formation of modern immunology and innovative research on specific remedies, and vaccines against deadly microbial infections. This biography explores his complex relations to the rival bacteriological schools of Robert Koch in Berlin and Louis Pasteur in Paris, the emergent German pharmaceutical industry, and the institutionalization of experimental therapeutic research. The second part of the volume contains translations of thirteen key articles by Behring and his associates on infectious diseases, immunology, drug testing, and therapeutics spanning thirty years of his remarkable scientific career.

Vol. 255 0-87169-255-4/978-0-87169-255-9 $65 Printed September 2005

John Haygarth, FRS (1740–1827): *A Physician of the Enlightenment*

Christopher Booth

John Haygarth, MD, FRS (1740–1827) hailed from an obscure valley in the Yorkshire dales in the north west of England. Educated at Sedbergh School, Cambridge, and Edinburgh, he became a physician in Chester in 1767. There he introduced separate wards in the Chester Infirmary where patients with fever could be isolated and cared for. It was the stimulus for the development of the fever hospitals of nineteenth-century England. Haygarth moved to Bath in 1798, where he continued to write on medical matters. He also played a major role in the foundation of the Bath Provident Institution for Savings, a model for the savings-bank movement in England.

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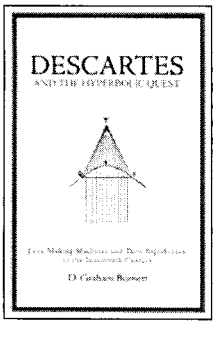

Descartes and the Hyperbolic Quest: Lens Making Machines and Their Significance in the Seventeenth Century

D. Graham Burnett

"...if you have a year or two to apply yourself to all that is necessary, I would hope that we might see, by your efforts, if there are animals on the moon..." With this alluring suggestion, penned in the autumn of 1629, René Descartes enticed a young provincial artisan to undertake an unprecedented and secretive project, one that promised to revolutionize early modern astronomy. Descartes believed he had conceived a new kind of telescope lens, shaped by the light of reason itself, and cut by an elaborate machine, a self-regulating and automatic device capable of bringing crystalline geometry to the muddy earth. This study traces the inception, development, and finally the collapse of this ambitious enterprise, which absorbed the energies and attentions of a broad range of seventeenth-century savants, including Huygens, Wren, Hevelius, Hooke, and even Newton. Examining in detail the making of lenses over a vitally significant century, *Descartes and the Hyperbolic Quest* sheds light on the history of telescopes in a tumultuous period, on the changing relationship between instrument makers and mathematical adepts, on the mechanical philosophy and its machines, and finally on the life and thought of Descartes himself.

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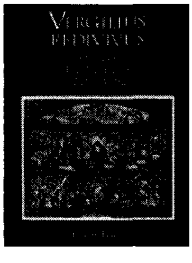

Vergilius Redivivus
Studies in Joseph Addison's Latin Poetry

Estelle Haan

Virtually ignored by modern scholarship, Addison's Latin verse has failed to receive the critical attention it deserves. Addison's current reputation rests almost exclusively on his role as the accomplished essayist of the *Spectator* and *Tatler* papers, as the author of the drama *Cato*, and as the composer of a body of minor English verse. Estelle Haan examines the intricate inter-textual relationships between some of Addison's neo-Latin poems and the poetic corpus of one Augustan poet: Virgil (in particular, the *Georgics*).

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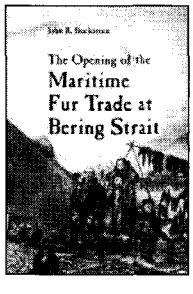

The Opening of the Maritime Fur Trade at Bering Strait
Americans and Russians Meet the Kanigmiut in Kotzebue Sound

John R. Bockstoce

The maritime fur trade was an important commercial force in the Bering Strait region from the early nineteenth century until to outbreak of the Second Word War; nevertheless, its origins are not well understood. Two important documents—which have received little scholarly attention—shed considerable light on the genesis of this trade. These manuscripts describe the voyages of the American trading brigs General San Martín in 1819 and Pedler in 1820, and they provide valuable information on the complicated relationships that existed between the American maritime traders and the Russian officials in Kamchatka and Alaska, as well as with the inhabitants of the Bering Strait region in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

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allies among the ideologically charged interest groups have come to play a much larger role in the selection of candidates, affecting the entire landscape in which our politics operate.

JON R. BOND
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

RICH FLEISHER
Fordham University
Bronx, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson, as usual, has it right. The nation is polarized, and increasingly so. The process perhaps began with the elites in Washington, but it has begun to metastasize around the country. On Capitol Hill, one sees not just partisan divisions but tribal politics. Walking the halls of Congress these days reminds me more of the former Yugoslavia than of the Congress I knew when I first arrived in Washington in 1969. The center was then dominant; now it is virtually nonexistent.

Mr. Wilson is also right that the danger of polarization is particularly acute when it comes to visions of America's role in the world. Here, too, the divisions are more than ideological. Consider the harshly negative response of Republican leaders like Tom DeLay to President Clinton's military action in Bosnia and Kosovo, and imagine what those same leaders would have said if the action had been taken by a President George Bush; do the reverse exercise with Democratic leaders and the campaign in Iraq. It becomes clear that the identity of the messenger can now be as important as the nature of the message.

The question Mr. Wilson does not address is what to do about all this. Structural solutions are limited in scope and effect. But there are some ways to ameliorate the divisions and begin to re-create a center that will reflect the larger consensus on many issues held by non-activist Americans. I agree that reforming our congressional districting arrangements is not a panacea, but it would help at the margins. A more deliberative legislative process in Congress could also help, as Thomas Mann and I argue in our forthcoming book, *The Broken Branch*. And we might want to stretch our minds and consider more novel ideas, including perhaps adding a significant number of at-large members of Congress who would not have to run for election in homogeneous districts filled with like-minded partisans.

But a broader change in cultural outlook will still be necessary. Those who identify with one or the other of the tribes must recognize that the looming War of the Roses in American political life could damage or destroy us all.

NORMAN ORNSTEIN
American Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

JAMES Q. WILSON writes:

Morris P. Fiorina and John H. Evans think that the public has sorted itself out rationally into the two major political parties but that this sorting has not affected attitudes on public policies. To believe this, they must not listen to talk radio, read liberal or conservative blogs, or pay any attention to poll data showing a vastly increased gap between the two parties on key public issues.

In 2004, 89 percent of Republicans but only 12 percent of Democrats approved of President George W. Bush. That gap is the widest that poll data have ever shown. In earlier decades, the percentage of Democrats saying they approved of Presidents Reagan, Ford, Nixon, and Eisenhower was three to four times greater.

Today, over two-thirds of all Republicans but far fewer than half of all Democrats agree with the view that military strength is the best way to ensure peace. Two-thirds of all Republicans but only one-fourth of all Democrats say they would be willing to fight for America whether it is right or wrong.

If you look at self-styled liberals and conservatives rather than at party affiliation, the same difference emerges. In 1972, over 40 percent of liberals approved of President Nixon; in 2004, only 24 percent approved of President Bush. In 1968, over 54 percent of liberals said we should either increase or maintain our troops in Vietnam. In 2004, over 80 percent of liberals disapproved of our war in Iraq.

On the central issues of the times, liberals and Democrats are more opposed to conservatives and Republicans today than they were three decades earlier. This reflects a profound change in attitudes, and not simply the tidying up of party affiliation. In fact, the deep differences between Democrats and Republicans have helped widen this split in popular attitudes, an argument that has been supported by the research of Marc Hetherington and Jeffrey D. Grynaviski.

My view differs from that of my critics because I think polarized elite opinion helps create polarized public opinion while, apparently, they do not. As Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders have shown in their work on ideological alignment, average Americans are as divided today as politically active Americans were divided 40 years ago. The mechanisms by which this happens are well known. Conservatives believe what they hear on Fox News and the Rush Limbaugh show and what they read on Power Line; liberals believe what they hear on National Public Radio or what they read in the *New York Times* or on MoveOn.org.

You cannot disprove this view by citing poll data from red and blue states for the obvious reason that these states are too large and internally divided to make any judgment possible. The coastal counties of California are blue, the interior ones are red. On balance, California is a blue state, but it is so deeply divided that when Mr. Fiorina looks at state-level policy views they strike him as "moderate."

Nor is my view harmed by what Walter Schimmerling points out about Hillary Clinton's effort to portray herself as a moderate. Presidential candidates seek marginal votes in a divided nation. If Clinton becomes the Democratic nominee, she knows almost every Democrat will vote for her. Her task, then, is to pick up a few Republican votes in order to win, and so, taking her base for granted, she goes after voters who believe in God and support the military.

I agree with Jon R. Bond and Rich Fleisher that ideologically charged interest

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THE RULE OF LAW AND THE LAW OF WAR

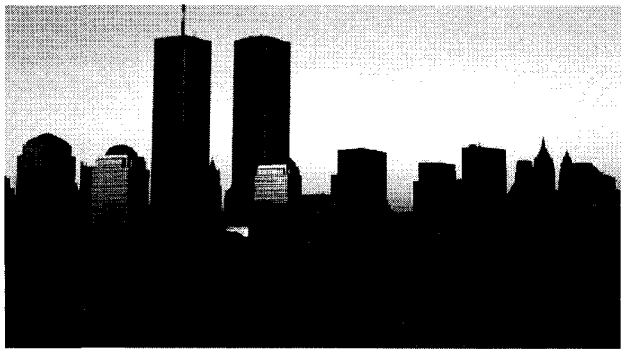
MILITARY COMMISSIONS AND ENEMY COMBATANTS

by Leonard Cutler

0-7734-6209-0 380pp. 2005

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, George W. Bush issued an executive order which permits the government to detain stateless members of terrorist organizations.

This book explains the constitutional right of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to issue military orders and how the Pentagon implements them.



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groups have become much more important than political parties in shaping the choice of candidates and framing the issues we debate.

Norman Ornstein has it quite right when he says that "the identity of the messenger can now be as important as the nature of the message." Key Republican members of Congress were harshly critical of President Clinton's interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, but very supportive of President Bush's invasion of Iraq. The *New York Times*, by contrast, urged Presidents George H. W. Bush and Clinton to intervene in Bosnia and Kosovo but opposed, both editorially and in most of its news columns, our invasion of Iraq.

Messengers have become more divided, and their messages, via talk radio and blogs, now reach many more people. And so people are more divided as well.

"Munich"

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's remarkably acerbic critique of Steven Spielberg's *Munich* [February 2006] is replete with impetuous and irrational conclusions at best, and slanderous accusations at worst. The first of Mr. Schoenfeld's political condemnations centers on the film's supposed moral equivalency between terrorists and their victims. As evidence, Mr. Schoenfeld cites a scene in which he claims that "the names of all those who perished at Munich, Israeli athletes and Palestinian terrorists alike, are read out in measured and doleful tones."

This, however, simply did not happen. Rather, the scene cuts from a news reporter reciting the Israelis' names to a Mossad officer listing the names of the terrorists *about* to be targeted for assassination. If this careful editing of the scene suggests anything at all, it is the contrast between living perpetrator and dead victim—their names are not read together as one equal group, rather as two distinct parties. And though the editing might imply that the terrorists and athletes share the same fate, the scene never suggests that the terrorists' impending death is unjustified or equivalent to that of the Israelis.

Mr. Schoenfeld also argues that the film never presents "a reasoned argument for striking back. . . . National security? Self-defense? Deterrence? Justified retribution? None of these considerations is invoked in all the film's talk and debate." Again, this is simply untrue. Mr. Schoenfeld may have chosen not to include them in his piece, but that does not mean they are not in the film. Golda Meir tells her audience, "Forget peace for now. We have to show them we're strong." This surely fits under the deterrence category, if not the self-defense category as well. Ephraim, the Mossad case officer, says: "We kill for our future. We kill for peace." It seems that he is arguing for striking back in the name of Israel's national security and self-defense.

Mr. Schoenfeld says the film suggests that "there has been a systematic killing by Jews of innocent Arabs." His proof lies in a few quotes from the doubting Mossad agents who demand to be shown evidence that their targets do in fact have bloody hands. Yet, at no point in the film are we told that the terrorists they are seeking to kill are innocent. To conclude from these brief quotations that the film actually means to portray the Israelis as terrorists, killing innocents, is reckless and rash.

Finally comes Mr. Schoenfeld's most egregious accusation: "a kind of bloodlust, we have been given to understand [by the film], is a default feature of the Israeli mentality." His evidence here is supplied by two quotations from supporting characters who rejoice after killing Palestinian terrorists. Yet Mr. Schoenfeld himself tells us that the protagonist Avner is "a man so wracked by guilt that he rejects Israel." One is left wondering what Mr. Schoenfeld wants from our Israeli heroes. He does not like that certain agents have doubts and are not bloodthirsty, but he also does not like that other Israeli agents are proud, sure, "heartless," and "methodical" in their actions.

Why, in the end, would Steven Spielberg, who has done so much to preserve the memory of murdered Jews, make a film portraying the Israelis as "evil"? And if he really felt they were evil, why shroud it in so much ambiguity? I believe Spielberg accomplished a remarkable feat in producing a balanced film that also honors the memory of murdered Israeli athletes. Mr. Schoenfeld's scathing attack is dangerous, irrational, and unjustified.

JOSH YUNIS
Alon Shevut, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld writes that Avner, disaffected with his mission and living in New York, "begins to suspect that he and his family are being targeted for death by the Mossad." This is a complete fantasy, totally unsupported by anything in the film. Avner is in fact shown telephoning the French anarchist contacts he had dealt with because he is afraid that *they* had sold him out.

Mr. Schoenfeld also never acknowledges that in the viewer's experience of the film the Israelis are the good guys and the terrorists are the bad guys. Whatever moral complexity may be present in the script does not change that fact.

EMANUEL GOLDMAN
Montclair, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld seems bothered that *Munich* was not conceived as a work of propaganda for Israel. Every scene or action that does not present Israel and Israelis as if in a tourist brochure is taken as evidence of the film's "pernicious" anti-Israel bias. But is it really so implausible that a Mossad agent assigned to avenge would be gripped with feelings of guilt, that he could feel mistrust and bitterness toward his government, that a superior could be fastidious about expenses, that another agent could say "The only blood I care about is Jewish blood!"? By taking these perfectly plausible occurrences as evidence of the bias he imagines, Mr. Schoenfeld seems to forget that this is not the way a dramatic film operates. Colorful, interesting characters cannot be drawn to pass Mr. Schoenfeld's or anyone else's ideological test, unless one prefers Stalinist art.

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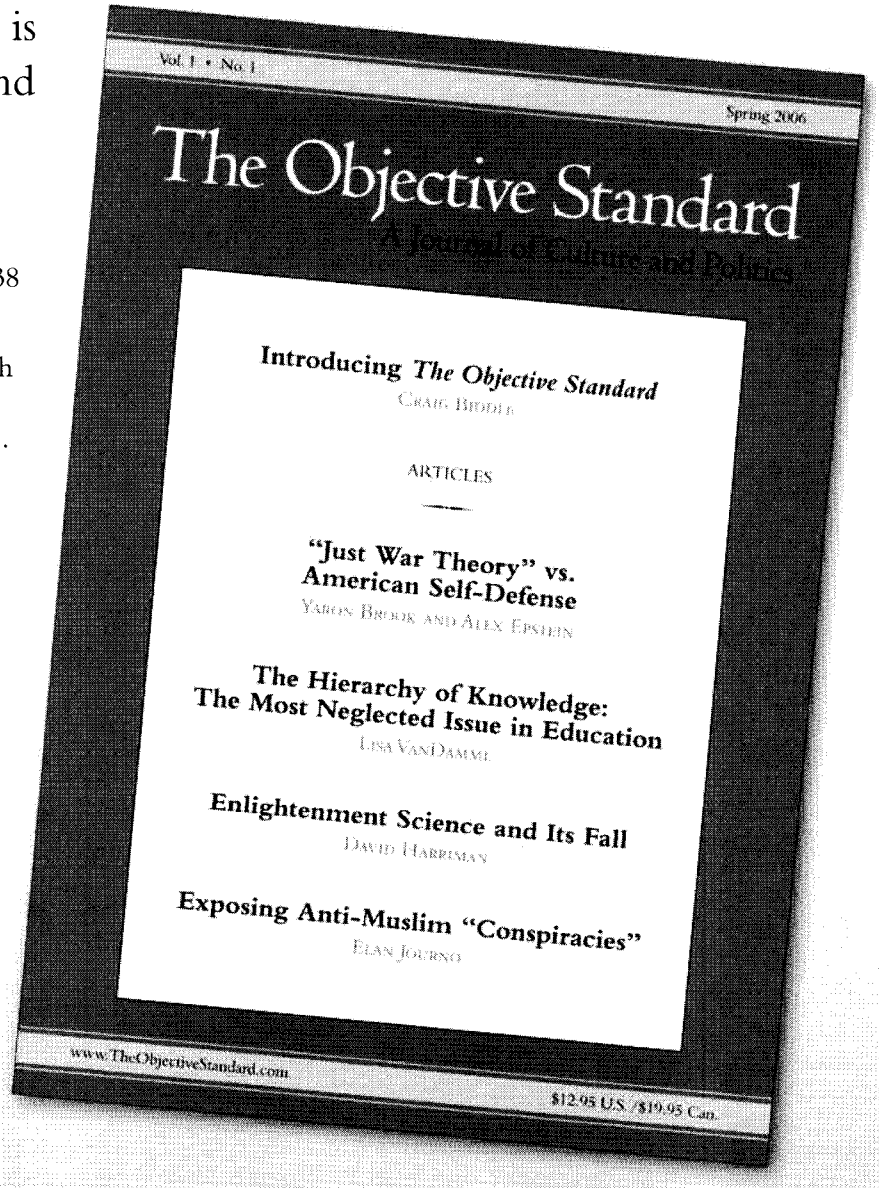

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Besides, it might be said that Spielberg cleaned up the story of Munich, omitting those aspects of it that are less flattering to Israel. As the critic Steve Sailer has pointed out, *Munich* skips the 1973 mistaken-identity fiasco in Lillehammer, Norway, where Mossad agents gunned down an innocent Moroccan waiter, and also does not dwell on various plausible ways, including torture, that the Mossad might have obtained leads into the whereabouts of wanted Palestinians.

In the assassinations we do see, the movie makes clear the pains the agents take to refrain from killing innocent life.

All in all, I thought the movie was pretty balanced.

LEE W. MICHAELS
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld is quite right to note that, in *Munich*, Israel's campaign to eliminate the murderers behind the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics is never justified "with a reasoned argument"; that, with the partial exception of their leader Avner, the principal characters in the Israeli hit team are "essentially stick figures" blindly following orders; and that in general Israel's assassination campaign is portrayed as resting on a deeply equivocal moral foundation. In a key moment cited by Mr. Schoenfeld, Golda Meir, Israel's prime minister, rationalizes her country's campaign with the line, "every civilization finds it necessary to negotiate compromises with its own values."

In short, the message is that Israel's actions in fighting terrorism, like the actions of the West today in its battle against Islamofascism, are properly subject to a fundamental and recurring moral doubt. And therein lies Steven Spielberg's own deadly and disabling delusion. For, when she sent Israelis to kill the terrorists, Golda Meier was emphatically not negotiating "compromises" with her values. She was *upholding* those values, and no value higher than that of protecting innocent life from wanton political violence.

To the terrorist, violence against the innocent is a deliberate strategy. In the West, violence against the innocent is forbidden. Indeed, it *must* be forbidden: does not basic liberty require at least this much? Once the category of the innocent becomes subject to doubt, so does Western political culture.

In Spielberg's world, there are no moral absolutes, no boundaries, no fixed standards, and hence neither practical guidelines nor agreed-upon principles by which to distinguish a terrorist from a freedom fighter, or from a counter-terrorist. There is only praiseworthy doubt—the doubt, for example, of Avner, a character sympathetically pictured by Spielberg as beset with introspection and second thoughts, psychologically adrift, a man literally without a home.

In the real world, by contrast, reflection on the principles of one's civilization can enable one to identify the minimal conditions for its perpetuation, and to act on that understanding. "Our [Western] conception of morality has little power over the terrorist," writes the real Avner in a foreword to the recent reissue of George Jonas's *Vengeance*, and he adds (in words quoted by Mr. Schoenfeld) that "if I had to do it all over again, I would make the same choice I made when Golda Meir approached me more than 30 years ago."

Avner remains "proud that I was able to serve my country in this way." In fact he served not only his country but Western civilization itself, which will survive only if it continues to embrace, and to fight for, the value of its own values. Whether the subject is Hitler's Holocaust, 9/11, Munich, the intifada, or the London bombings, no Western value can be less susceptible of doubt than the inviolability of the innocent. In falsely portraying Avner as tormented by equivocation on this score, *Munich* shows only the reflexive doubts of Steven Spielberg and those who think like him—doubts that, by diluting the moral clarity of this most basic premise of Western culture, serve ultimately to enable the mindset of the terrorist.

MARTIN J. GROSS
Livingston, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's review should be mandatory reading for those planning to see Spielberg's *Munich*. Spielberg's intention may have been to demonstrate the moral ambiguities involved in seeking revenge against terrorists. But what he produced instead is a film laden with vicious stereotypes. Israelis are depicted as money-grubbing, demonic characters, counting the cost of each kill and performing dastardly deeds by the dozens. The terrorists, on the other hand, are softened and humanized and have little or no connection to actual acts of terror. The movie is also a jumble of cause and effect. The massacre of the Israeli athletes is made to seem more like a response to Israeli "atrocities."

Spielberg's *Munich* is a false accounting of history.

JENENE STOOKESBERRY
Denver, Colorado

TO THE EDITOR:

Bravo to Gabriel Schoenfeld for his careful look at Spielberg's *Munich*. My question is: did Mr. Schoenfeld really expect anything better? Were it not for Steven Spielberg's bona fides as a conscientious Jew thanks to his production of *Schindler's List* and his participation in various Holocaust-remembrance projects, there would be nothing remarkable about the politically correct distortions of *Munich*. The film would simply stand as yet another example of Hollywood's contorting history in order to award the moral high ground to the downtrodden victim du jour.

Like so many others in the entertainment industry, Spielberg exudes sympathy for Jews as long as they are incapable of defending themselves and while being maimed and martyred by their enemies. But after living Jews have achieved the power and means to protect themselves, the sympathy is withdrawn.

LISA C. FELDMAN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

The film *Munich* brought back vivid memories of the massacre that took place 34 years ago. Mr. Schoenfeld's incisive comments about the movie are directly on point. Steven

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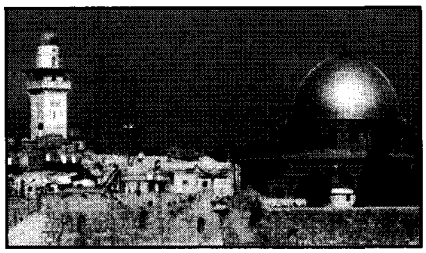

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Dr. David B. Ruderman (Ph.D., Hebrew University, Jerusalem) is Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is Director of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. He has won a JWB National Book Award in Jewish History and a lifetime achievement award for his work in Jewish history from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

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Spielberg's film depicts the human side of terrorists while telling us nothing about the murdered Israeli athletes. I, for one, am appalled by Spielberg's "balanced" view.

MARTY SAEPOFF
Delray Beach, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

I saw *Munich* with a friend at Christmas. Neither of us is Jewish, or particularly aware of Jewish issues, but I was unhappy with the way the movie petered out in doubt and pointlessness. Then I read Gabriel Schoenfeld's eye-opening essay. He make the movie's deceptions and dishonesty very clear. I hope his article circulates far and wide.

JOCELYN TOMKIN
Austin, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

Steven Spielberg's *Munich* was billed as a fair depiction of one episode in the Arab-Israeli conflict, ostensibly giving voice to both sides in an unbiased manner. After seeing the film I was satisfied with this assessment—until I read Gabriel Schoenfeld's illuminating article, which pulls back the curtain and shows us who is pulling the strings. Mr. Schoenfeld's work represents criticism at its best. *Munich* has merits as a film, but evenhandedness is not among them.

JOHN BENNETT
Fort Benning, Georgia

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD writes:

It is possible that Josh Yunis and Emanuel Goldman have seen versions of Spielberg's *Munich* that vary from the one I saw, but more likely we have seen the same film quite differently. Either way, I am flattered that Mr. Yunis finds my essay "dangerous," and I sincerely hope that he is right about that. About almost everything else, he is either half wrong or worse, and the single thing he gets mostly right is without consequence.

The names read off at the beginning of the movie are, as Mr. Yunis states, not those of the Arab terrorists who have just died at Munich but those of the terrorist planners who are being marked for death by the Mossad. But viewers cannot learn the identity of the men behind those Arabic names unless they immediately write them down and then match (or rather fail to match) them with the terrorists—or unless they watch the film twice. Moreover, as Mr. Yunis neglects to say but as I pointed out in my article, while the names are being read aloud, we see on the screen "a grief-stricken Israeli family and a grief-stricken Palestinian family; then another grief-stricken Israeli family and another grief-stricken Palestinian family; and so forth." Could there be a more vivid example of moral equivalence between victims and victimizers? In this respect, Steven Spielberg is indeed, as Mr. Yunis avers, a careful editor of film.

It is true that, as Mr. Yunis also reports, the film has Golda Meir saying, "Forget peace for now. We have to show them we're strong." And it is again true that Avner's case officer says, "We kill for our future. We kill for peace." According to Mr. Yunis, these brief statements provide a clear rationale for Israel's retaliatory action. It seems to have escaped his notice that both remarks are saturated with irony—not the irony committed by a speaker for conscious effect but the irony of an author or director whose intent is to discredit the speech of a character before his audience. The assertion that Israel must "kill for peace" is an Orwellian inversion whose ironic significance in the context of this film should be plain to anyone not intent on shutting his eyes and stuffing his ears.

Mr. Yunis argues that my view of the Mossad agents is contradictory. On the one hand, I say that Spielberg has imbued them with a kind of "bloodlust." On the other hand, I say that they—and Avner in particular—harbor doubts and are increasingly wracked by guilt. I do say both things, but there is no contradiction. The Israeli killers begin their mission full of bloodlust. ("Drink some wine, we're celebrating," says one, after their first kill. "I am not celebrating: I am goddamn rejoicing," responds another.) But as their mission proceeds, and their education in evil deepens, the celebrations cease and the anguished denunciations of Israel and of themselves commence. There is nothing "impetuous" or "irrational" or "slanderous" in pointing such things out.

To Emanuel Goldman, my assertion that Avner begins to suspect that he and his family are being targeted for death by the Mossad "is a complete fantasy." Yet this "fantasy" happens to coincide with the reality portrayed by the film. Toward the very end, not long after he has been frightened by a limousine that appears to be shadowing him on a Brooklyn street, Avner barges into the Israeli consulate, strides past security guards into the office of the resident Mossad chief, and shouts: "I won't hesitate to kill other people's children if you hurt my children. Leave my family alone. . . . I'll go to the newspapers, I'll tell everything, I'll give names, if you don't leave my family alone." Somehow, to me, this sounds as if Avner believes the Mossad is out to kill him and his wife and child.

Mr. Goldman complains that I never acknowledge what the viewer experiences: "the Israelis are the good guys and the terrorists are the bad guys." Yes, the Israelis turn out to be good guys, but only in the sense that, as the film progresses, they come to doubt the morality of their mission. Avner, because he renounces Israel and moves to the United States, is the best good guy of the lot.

And the terrorists? The ones who are killed by the Mossad team seem like very pleasant and engaging types: poetry-reciting, piano-playing, Swedish-teaching, olive-growing, charming, fatherly, and, by the way, wholly innocent of any connection to terrorism. Some bad guys.

Lee W. Michaels is on to something important when he states that *Munich* could have mounted an even more forceful assault on Israel, either by dwelling on the Lillehammer incident or by emphasizing Israeli brutality and torture. But if Spielberg had gone for blatant demonization, the game would have been up. As it is, with the assistance of the screenwriter Tony Kushner (whose repeated ultra-left-wing denunciations of Israel my critics fail to mention), he has put together a

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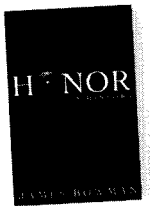

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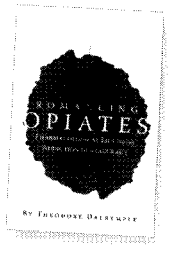

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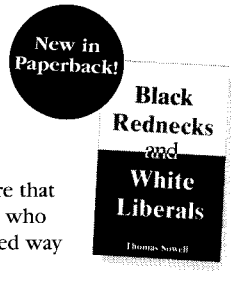

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movie that makes some Israelis look decent while making the state of Israel look indecent.

Munich is hardly a crude work of anti-Israel agitprop. It was written and produced with a measure of subtlety. This, along with its graphic depictions of violence, is what makes it so powerful—and why I still believe it deserved an Oscar for being the most pernicious film of 2005. Alas for Steven Spielberg, it won neither that Oscar nor any other.

I thank all of my correspondents and especially John Bennett, Lisa C. Feldman, Martin J. Gross, Marty Saepoff, Jenene Stookesberry, and Jocelyn Tomkin for their warm reactions.

The Origins of Life

TO THE EDITOR:

In a letter to Joseph Hooker in 1863, Charles Darwin wrote: "It is mere rubbish, thinking of the origin of life; one might as well think of the origin of matter." Although we physicists now routinely discuss the latter topic, Darwin's pessimism 150 years ago is perhaps understandable, coming as it did before most of the edifice of modern physics was built, and before more than a century of growing knowledge about chemistry and biology would bring us closer to the brink of understanding life's origins. But it is harder to understand the purpose of David Berlinski's ultimately facile rumination, "On the Origins of Life" [February].

At first I thought the article was a reasonably cogent discussion of the history of how science has shed light on this seminal but still puzzling event in the history of the earth. But as I read on, it seemed that Mr. Berlinski's purpose was not to explore the edge of knowledge but rather to expound the completely trivial fact that the edge of knowledge is fuzzy. Ultimately it became clear that his article was designed to convey the hackneyed and intellectually lazy argument that because there are things that are truly puzzling and paradoxical about nature, one should be prepared to give up trying to devise any natural explanation for them.

I found the errors and omissions in Mr. Berlinski's in-depth discussion of molecular biology particularly telling. He harps on the red herring provided by the famous Miller-Urey experiment—which purported to demonstrate that amino acids could form naturally in the pre-biotic atmosphere—pointing out that the actual pre-biotic atmosphere was nothing like the "primordial soup" that Miller and Urey mixed up in their beakers, and lacked the "reducing" capacity necessary for the all-important chemical reactions. Fair enough. But Mr. Berlinski ignores the wealth of new data on a wonderful reducing environment associated with thermal vents at the bottom of the ocean. There is growing evidence, genetic and otherwise, that this anaerobic environment, where sulfur could play the role currently played by oxygen in exciting electrons to release energy, is associated with those organisms closest to the root of the tree of life.

Perhaps most surprising, given Mr. Berlinski's background in mathematics, is his innumeracy in regurgitating the tired arguments about probability and the origin of life. Not only does he make the standard probabilistic error of assuming that self-replicating molecules result from totally random interactions—the same sort of analysis would argue against the formation of *any* complex molecule—but in doing so, he misinterprets the orders of magnitude involved. He argues, for example, that the number of nucleotide sequences of 100 nucleotides in length (the minimum thought necessary for "demonstrated ligase activity," the first step in self-replication) is greater than the number of atoms in the universe—making the odds in favor of self-replication rather long. Well, the number of such sequences is very large, but in fact there are far more atoms in our local region of the Milky Way galaxy.

When I recently researched a book about the history of an oxygen atom, I had to learn about advances in molecular and evolutionary biology, fields with which I had not been familiar. The remarkable discoveries being made about archaea, hyperthermophiles, and the possibility of inorganic templates for the earliest self-replicating molecules filled me with wonder, excitement, and optimism. That is what science is supposed to do. But one can also decide in advance (as Darwin did in his time and Mr. Berlinski does now) that the answers are unknowable, and choose to bury one's head in the sand.

LAWRENCE M. KRAUSS
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio

TO THE EDITOR:

David Berlinski has performed the greater part of a difficult task—guiding his readers through the wilderness of origin-of-life theory. He first leads us through the complexities of modern molecular biology, explaining the key roles of large molecules like DNA, RNA, and proteins. He describes how knowledge about their function inspired the "RNA world" theory of the origin of life (by which life came into being on the basis of RNA replication), and proceeds to demolish this theory utterly. The reader is thus taken to the very edge of the promised land, which in this case would be a description of the most likely answer to the origin-of-life problem, and one that meets the constraints of "the model for what science should be"—which, as Mr. Berlinski puts it, requires that the laws of a system's development be unique and stable.

But having taken us this far, Mr. Berlinski devotes only three paragraphs to the scientific alternative most likely to provide that answer, often called "metabolism first," which holds that life began with an interactive network of small molecules that used an available energy source to maintain its identity and promote its further evolution. He notes that this view "may well be right," but cautions that "there is as yet no evidence that it is true" and suggests that the answer may ultimately lie beyond the powers of scientific inquiry. At this point he and I part company, for I believe that the answer does lie in the idea of "metabolism first," and is in fact close at hand.

Before I elaborate on

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this, I should point out that the case against an "RNA world" is even stronger than the one Mr. Berlinski presents. Not only were cytosine and ribose unlikely to have been present in any quantity on the early earth, but the same can also be said of adenine and guanine. Moreover, no adequate explanation of the manner in which these parts (and others) could connect together spontaneously to form RNA has ever been presented. All of the celebrated triumphs of "prebiotic synthesis" were actually accomplished through the active intervention of the experimenter, as Mr. Berlinski notes about two such cases.

An even more serious difficulty exists, one I call the termination problem. Imagine a series of units, each of which contains a plug and a socket. If we arrange circumstances so that they will connect together, they have no alternative but to join head-to-tail to form a linear array. But if we include a large excess of units that have only a plug or a socket, these units can connect on one side but then terminate any growing chain. This problem applies not only to DNA, RNA, and protein but also to the many RNA surrogates that have been put forward as additional examples of molecules that could have copied themselves, thereby initiating life.

This problem can be avoided if we assume—to return to the idea of "metabolism first"—that life began with small molecules (monomers) rather than, as the "RNA world" theory has it, with the entities produced by connecting them (polymers like DNA, RNA, and protein). Monomer mixtures can carry heredity, not as linear text as in DNA but by the presence of certain substances and the absence of others. This form of information storage, which has been called a "compositional genome," could reproduce simply by splitting into two parts. Thus, I prefer the term "monomer world" to "metabolism first," as the latter implies a lack of genetic ability.

For an analogy, imagine my wife gives me a shopping list (linear text) for the supermarket. If I come home merely with a copy of the list, she will not be pleased. If I return with an assortment of produce and canned goods (a compositional genome), she can tell by inspection that I have brought the desired items. The information is provided by the objects themselves rather than by the list.

Monomers can also show substantial catalytic ability, though less than the elaborate proteins and ribozymes that were produced by extended evolution. A key requirement for monomer life is an external energy source that interacts with a chemical mixture in a way that both releases the energy and organizes the mixture. No "smoking gun" experiment has as yet been devised that demonstrates the operation of such a system, but much preliminary work has been carried out. Suitable individual reactions have been explored, monomer catalysis has been amply demonstrated, and the natural occurrence of compartments (or other barriers) that could separate an evolving chemical system from its environment has been documented. I summarize the evidence for all this in a forthcoming paper.

In my opinion, the principal barrier to the demonstration of such a system is not technical but lies in the sociology of science. The intellectual elegance of the "RNA world" solution has diverted scientific interest and funding down a dead-end street. If the same effort and ingenuity were applied to the experimental exploration of "monomer world" theories, I believe that a satisfying laboratory demonstration of the early steps in the origin of life could be achieved.

ROBERT SHAPIRO
New York University
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Around the time I read David Berlinski's summary of the failures of origin-of-life research, I saw a report in the *Economist* taking up similar issues. After quoting the insights of the researcher Charles Cockell, who argues that early impact craters full of hot water were "ideal places for life to get going," the anonymous author notes that "the biggest irony of all . . . might be that the conditions once thought a near-insuperable obstacle to the emergence of life on earth may actually have enabled it to come about." Well, yes, that *would* be handy. If only sinking businesses and failing states could pull off stunts like that.

Meanwhile, on February 15, the American Association for the Advancement of Science published a short feature quoting another researcher, David Deamer, who enterprisingly developed his own primordial soup. He dumped a can of the stuff into a hot volcanic pool and found that most of the material simply disappeared, uninspired, into the clay lining of the pond. He concluded that such pools may be unlikely spots for "the first assembly of life's little bits."

Actually, if the recipe were really "just add water and boil," we should see new life forms springing from chemical soups all the time. But current theory insists on at most a few common ancestors. So there must have been some magic in that old soup cauldron. Or are we on the wrong track?

Current origin-of-life research seems fundamentally incoherent. People who are convinced that life originated by an unlikely accident also believe that they can find out exactly how it happened. Origin-of-life researchers also sometimes denounce intelligent-design theory. But if the universe started with a large input of information, whether provided by a cosmic mind or an inherent principle of organization, we can safely postulate that the origin of life was not an accident—nor was the human mind that now studies them.

DENYSE O'LEARY
Toronto, Canada

TO THE EDITOR:

As far back as 1897, the American biologist E.B. Wilson wrote in his textbook, *The Cell in Development and Inheritance*: "The study of the cell has, on the whole, seemed to widen rather than to narrow the enormous gap that separates even the lowest forms of life from the inorganic world." I gather from David Berlinski's characteristically brilliant article that even as late as 2006, Wilson's assertion requires no emendation.

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Earlier than Wilson, the 19th-century founder of positivism, Auguste Comte, defined the problem this way: the change of order that takes place when we pass from the inorganic to the organic is—in plain, open fact—the passage from an order in which the parts precondition the whole to an order in which the whole shapes the parts and, in a sense, precedes them, as if the parts were there only in view of the whole.

As a positivist, Comte was rightly unnerved by that ineluctable reality, for it conjures up the specter of final causality, with its implication that the mental precedes the material. But at least he noted the problem of teleology raised by the organic world instead of just wishing it away, as Francis Bacon did in his manifesto, *On the Proficience and Advancement of Learning* (1605), in which he compares final causes to a lamprey clinging to the side of a ship and impeding its progress. As the great French medievalist Etienne Gilson says in *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again* (1971), "The important thing is to know whether or not final causality expresses a fact given in nature, for if we object to final causality as an explanation, it still remains as a fact to be explained."

With Mr. Berlinski, I do not deny that the invocation of final causality has gummed up scientific methodology down through the ages (Bacon's point). But the converse must also hold true: maybe science cannot, from the outset, get at the whole of reality. Again, Gilson gets it exactly right: "If the scientist refuses to include final causality in his interpretation of nature, all is in order; his interpretation of nature will be incomplete, not false. On the contrary, if he denies that there is final causality in nature, he is being arbitrary. To hold final causality to be beyond science is one thing; to put it beyond nature is something completely different. In the name of what *scientific* principle could one exclude from a description of reality an aspect of nature so evident?"

EDWARD T. OAKES, S.J.
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DAVID BERLINSKI writes:

The physicist Lawrence M. Krauss has become well known for the unflagging zeal with which he has defended Darwin's theory of evolution from its critics. With admirable gusto, he has recently undertaken to wave the crutch of his concerns toward his colleagues in physics as well. String theory, he argues in *Hiding in the Mirror* (2005), seems to have gone nowhere, and to have gotten there rapidly. Inasmuch as the same can be said of his letter, Mr. Krauss appears to have achieved postmodern status as a perfectly self-referential critic.

It was my intention, he asserts, to "expound the completely trivial fact that the edge of knowledge is fuzzy." Edges by their nature cannot be fuzzy; and "the edge of knowledge" suggests an inscription on a medieval map. Instead of the edge of knowledge, shall we say current research, and instead of fuzzy, inconclusive? With these corrections in place, Mr. Krauss's trivial fact is rather less trivial than he supposes. The scientific establishment, after all, has expended a great deal of energy denying it, especially when funding is at stake.

Having made his point once, Professor Krauss makes it again. My article, he writes, "was designed to convey the hackneyed and intellectually lazy argument that because there are things that are truly puzzling and paradoxical about nature, one should be prepared to give up trying to devise any natural explanation for them." Not at all. I am not one of those who, for example, give up on string theory at the first suggestion of intellectual difficulty. I propose to give up only when the getting out is good. In my article on the origins of life, I hesitated conspicuously.

But to specifics. Mr. Krauss concludes that my observations on the Miller-Urey experiment are "fair enough," but he objects that I ignored "the wealth of new data on a wonderful reducing environment associated with [hydro]thermal vents at the bottom of the sea." Those hydrothermal vents—now divided into the superbly named "black smokers," where hot volcanic material containing metal sulphides gushes into cold sea water, creating a characteristic black spume, and "cold seepers," whose etymology is perhaps best left unexplored—made their first appearance as origin-of-life contenders in a paper published in *Science* in 1979. Thereafter, the German organic chemist and patent attorney Günter Wächtershäuser promoted them to a still more prominent status by imagining a rich series of inorganic catalytic reactions that might have taken place in such environments. A number of distinct (and immensely interesting) chemical ideas were put in play, the most notable involving iron pyrite acting to promote cyclic chemical reactions among carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen.

But experiments did not produce a significant yield of crucial biological molecules, and critics (like Gerald Joyce) have complained that some of the experiments themselves were carried out under unrealistic laboratory conditions. Matthew Levy and Stanley Miller have argued in addition that, although "a high-temperature origin of life may be possible," it "cannot involve adenine, uracil, guanine, or cytosine"—because, at such temperatures, these molecules are notoriously unstable.

In brief, Mr. Krauss's "iron-sulphur world" is not new; nor is it "wonderful" (although it is certainly interesting); nor, most of all, is it relevant to the scenario of an "RNA world" to which my own article was largely devoted. The two scenarios, as everyone familiar with the field understands, are in conflict, the "iron-sulphur world" being a natural entryway into the "metabolism first" theories that I mentioned briefly in the conclusion of my article (and shall return to in my comments on Robert Shapiro's letter).

It is nonetheless a fact that the "RNA world" scenario, which the "iron-sulphur world" is intended to displace, is still the dominant system of thought in origin-of-life research, still the most powerful intellectual structure in contention, and still the locus of the greatest in-

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Suicide Bombers in Israel— What Do They Really Want?

Are those who kill innocent civilians seeking freedom and peace . . . or do they have other motivations?f

What are the facts?

It's easy to sympathize with Arabs in the disputed Israeli territories and Gaza who live in squalid conditions and economic hopelessness. Indeed, many Westerners believe it's this desperate poverty, plus strict Israeli security measures, that drive suicide bombers to blow themselves up in pizza parlors, buses and college cafeterias.

Unfortunately, this romanticized image of the suicide bomber doesn't square with the facts.

Who are these suicide bombers? Study after study shows that the primary motivation of suicide bombers is neither desperation nor depression nor hopelessness. Indeed most suicide bombers are middle-class, educated and emotionally stable. Noted psychologist Dr. Irwin Mansdorf has observed, "While [suicide bombers] may feel oppressed, the stimulus for the act is nationalistic and political, not psychopathological and clinical. In the case of Islamic terror, [there is] the additional variable of becoming a shahid (martyr), with all its attendant religious rewards."

> ". . . they murder as a matter of honor, as a religious and political imperative—to rid the region of a people they see as infidels."

In fact, it is terrorist groups known for their outspoken religious and political agendas—like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hizbollah and Al Qaeda—that claim credit for nearly every suicide bombing in Israel and around the world.

What do they say they want? Hamas and Islamic Jihad—as well as the young men and women they recruit as human bombs—make no secret of their goals. Indeed, Hamas' charter states that "Israel will exist . . . until Islam will obliterate it." Make no mistake: When well-meaning Westerners speak of Israeli "occupation," they generally refer to disputed territories in the West Bank. When Hamas and Islamic Jihad speak of occupation, they refer to all the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River—including all of present-day Israel. Even the official symbol of the Palestinian Authority depicts a map of the region in which there is no Israel.

It is telling that Palestinian suicide bombers never claim they are killing to achieve peace with Israel. Rather, they murder as a matter of honor, as a religious and political imperative—to rid the region of a people they see as infidels. Ultimately, of course, all jihadists—whether in Israel, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, or Iran—seek to make the world, including the U.S., a fundamentalist Islamic dictatorship.

Can killing innocent civilians lead to peace? What is the military objective of randomly killing unarmed men, women and children as they dine, dance or celebrate religious events? It can only be to strike terror in the hearts of its victims, their families and their communities. We must ask: When has this barbaric tactic ever worked—when has it led to peace and freedom for its perpetrators? The answer is never—never in human history has terrorism succeeded as a military strategy. Yet the suicide bombings continue, even as Israel withdraws from Gaza and places more territory in the hands of Palestinians.

Why do Palestinian poverty and security restrictions continue? Suicide bombers never claim they kill innocents to solve the Palestinians' economic plight, but there's no doubt that Arabs in Gaza and the disputed territories suffer from heart-rending poverty, corruption, and political oppression. Billions of dollars have poured into the Palestinian Authority from the U.S., the U.N and European nations, but virtually none of this money has found its way to economic development—in fact, most of it has landed in the bank accounts of corrupt Palestinian politicians or to support terror operations. Indeed, to this day, the Palestinian Authority still makes reward payments to the families of suicide bombers. Now that the avowedly terrorist group Hamas has taken control of the Palestinian Authority, the world community must cut off this funding and limit aid strictly to humanitarian purposes.

Don't believe, either, that suicide bombers kill civilians to rid Israel of its security fence or to end its many security checkpoints, which cause great inconvenience and frustration for many Palestinians. Indeed, it is precisely to prevent murder by suicide bombers that Israel has instituted these stringent security measures. The good news is, they work.

What's the next step toward Arab-Israeli peace? Above all, Muslims must, as *New York Times* writer Anne Applebaum asserts, "change the culture that celebrates self-immolation and that sick form of honor and pride." Instead of glorifying suicide bombers, the Muslim world, on whose behalf these terrorists claim they are acting, must scorn their barbaric acts. Only then can we hope for peace . . . in Israel, in Iraq, and in the rest of the world.

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vestment of time and money. I did not discuss the "iron-sulphur world" because, in my judgment, it does not possess the same degree of intrinsic importance as its chief rival, either historically or scientifically.

There remains the charge of my "innumeracy," a condition I allegedly attained while "regurgitating the tired arguments about probability and the origin of life." Mr. Krauss's premise is that I am mistaken in assuming that self-replicating molecules must have arisen from totally random interactions, for, were I correct in this, the same argument would militate against the formation of *any* complex molecule. Here he confuses doubts about the applicability of the theory of probability with an error in the theory itself.

What Mr. Krauss takes to be a mistake is simply a fact. When nucleotides are connected in a sugar-phosphate chain, they form a polynucleotide. Polymerization is the chemical activity involved in forming such chains. But a problem arises when questions are asked about the specific sequences of nitrogenous bases required to carry out replication (or any other biological activity). It is a problem because, while polynucleotides are formed by means of ordinary laws of covalent chemical association (given an energy source), polymerization itself is not sequence-specific. Like flags mounted on stalks, the nitrogenous bases are fixed to their sugar-phosphate backbone, but the *order* in which they are fixed is free.

The standard (and only) accounts of this in the various "RNA world" scenarios begin with what Leslie Orgel and Gerald Joyce call "a random pool of nucleotides." For a self-replicating polynucleotide to be obtained from this pool, some process of polymerization must have taken place. But polymerization is sequence-specific *only* in the context of the laboratory or the living cell. Since neither was available in any prebiotic era, there remains chance, and only chance, as a guiding force.

Hence the perfect relevance of probabilistic calculations. Those "tired arguments"—which by the way are not mine but have been made by Gustaf Arrhenius as well as by Orgel and Joyce—still seem to me remarkably vigorous, and at least twice as strong as the Parthenon.

Finally, I did not argue that the number of nucleotide sequences that are 100 nucleotides in length is "greater than the number of atoms in the universe." I observed that the number of such sequences is precisely 4 to the 100th (or roughly 10 to the 60th) power, and then illustrated the magnitude of this number by comparing it with the number of atoms in the universe or the time in seconds that has elapsed since the Big Bang.

My observation was mathematically correct—obviously so. Scrupling instead with my illustration, Krauss could, for all I know, be right, although he provides no evidence or argument. Estimates in the literature tend to vary by a great many orders of magnitude; no one quite knows, for example, how many atoms to assign to the unobserved portions of the universe. But those atoms could disappear from my argument with no ill effect. Four raised to the one-hundredth power would still remain a dauntingly large number. It is embarrassing to have to point such things out.

Observing with satisfaction the various noses I punched in my article, Robert Shapiro suggests that I should have taken a shot at chain termination as well—that is, the tendency of growing polymers to branch off absurdly before achieving any form of biological usefulness. I am sure he is right about this, and he is right again in his comments about the sociology of science.

Like an immense ocean liner, big science achieves its momentum at the expense of flexibility; no matter the theory, correction and readjustment are very slow in coming, when they come at all. String theory and the "RNA world" entered the scientific imagination at roughly the same moment and have followed a similar trajectory, in which expectations have steadily outrun accomplishments. If this were the whole of the story, judgment would be easy. But both theories also have outstanding accomplishments to their credit, so that even their critics can feel the allure of the common counsel not to give up, at least *not just yet*.

As for "metabolism first" theories, they do indeed represent an alternative to the "RNA world" scenario. But as I have already indicated, my aim was not to survey the entire field but to construct a responsible and coherent narrative, one that describes the shape of research as it is, not as it may be.

My view of the theories that have engaged Mr. Shapiro's interest is respectful but wary. The metabolism-first world is the work of organic chemists, reflecting a decision to establish, as the decisive origin-of-life event, the advent of certain self-sustaining or autocatalytic cycles. The reverse citric-acid cycle plays a prominent role in these deliberations, conjecturally preceded by a primitive citrate cycle that takes place within an iron-sulphur world and is catalyzed not by biological enzymes but by metal ions.

Any chemical cycle consists of a linked series of reaction steps; an autocatalytic cycle is one whose products feed back into the cycle, thus keeping it going. But even assuming the existence of something like a primitive citrate cycle driven by non-biological catalysts, no one has yet demonstrated that the quite different conditions required for conversion to a true autocatalytic system could have obtained in the pre-biotic era. The only true autocatalytic cycle remains the formose reaction, and for reasons that I discussed at length in my article, that reaction does not seem to be going anywhere.

The idea of a compositional genome, to which Mr. Shapiro also draws our attention, is largely the work of Doron Lancet's research group at the Weizmann Institute of Science. It is meant to serve, as Lancet has said, as a "bridge between the 'genome first' and the 'metabolism-first' paradigms." In a very broad sense, the work of Lancet and his colleagues is continuous with the work of Mannfred Eigen, Freeman Dyson, and

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Stuart Kaufmann in that it seeks to create a theory in which order can be seen to appear out of chaos.

The chaos in this case is the froth of chemicals sloshing around somewhere in the pre-biotic era. No particular molecule within the froth is capable of self-replication. But might the ensemble itself be capable of this, at least to the extent that, after many random chemical interactions, one will have an ensemble closely matching the compositional characteristics of the original? This is the Lancet group's thesis, one that has been advanced by means both of a few differential equations and of a fabulous series of computer simulations.

The result is called the Amphiphilic Graded Autocatalysis Replication Model, or A-Gard, and I must confess it seems to me to reflect an inflation of trivialities. A loaf of bread, when divided, gives rise to two smaller loaves that share the compositional structure of the original. Of course they do; they are made of bread, after all. I suppose that one could call this a form of heredity, but then any division of any material structure would embody a form of heredity as well.

To me, the difference between the behavior of various chemical ensembles studied largely in computer simulations and the coded chemistry characteristic of living systems still seems absolute. Lancet's enterprise is an attempt to make the Darwinian principles of random variation and natural selection do useful work in the pre-biotic era, where plainly they do not belong, and in my view it thus represents a step in the wrong direction.

Denyse O'Leary mentions David Deamer, who has been an important figure in origins-of-life research. As she says, reports suggest that his most recent experiments have been a flop. "The results are surprising," Deamer himself has remarked, "and in some ways disappointing. It seems that hot acidic waters containing clay do not provide the right conditions for chemicals to assemble themselves into 'pioneer organisms.'"

But I differ with Denyse O'Leary's statement that there is something "incoherent" about current origins-of-life research. In many respects, the study of the earth's pre-biotic and early biological eras are stronger, better informed, and more penetrating than research devoted to the near-history of life. We understand the issues of pre-biotic chemistry more clearly than we understand the appearance of echo-location in bats or the emergence of the mammalian visual system. The truth of the matter still remains beyond our grasp, but organic chemists and molecular biologists have given us a splendid and inspiring example of the sheer power of their methods. What we do not now know, we at least know better than we did.

I agree with the spirit of Edward T. Oakes's remarks, and in one respect with their substance as well. The study of the modern cell has been an exercise in astonishment. The thing is complex beyond belief, and molecular biologists, as anyone reading the journals will attest, have only begun to explore that complexity. For the moment, we lack the proper tools even to offer a precise and reasonably complete account of the cell's biochemistry and biology; a full, satisfying, and profound understanding of its nature lies far in the future.

On the other hand, I do not think that a revival of the Aristotelian categories is apt to occur any time soon. A willful blindness to the plain facts of teleology in the universe? Perhaps. Biology, even on the molecular and biochemical level, is surely pervaded by teleological thinking. The activities of the cell are purposeful, and so too are the activities of every system made from cells. No one for a moment doubts that the purpose of the heart is to pump blood. These similes—the heart is like a pump—may in the end prove ineliminable. Nonetheless, they strike molecular biologists and biochemists as impediments to thought.

I would like to suggest to Father Oakes a somewhat different perspective. Let us drop Aristotle for the moment. In the standard view of the sciences, explaining the universe is an activity best conceptualized in terms of a descending order: from mind, to life, to matter. (That indeed is how I am proceeding in this series of articles, which began in November 2004 with "On the Origins of the Mind.") To put this in terms of scientific disciplines, psychology vanishes into biology; biology vanishes into molecular biology and then into biochemistry; further down there is organic chemistry; then come physics and, finally, mathematics. But what if the arrows pointing downward are reversed, so that, in the end, mathematics and with it our entire picture of the physical universe turns out to be crucially contingent on psychology—i.e., on mind?

Readers of COMMENTARY eager for my third and final essay in the series may take these remarks as a preview of coming attractions.

Correction

In "How Corrupt Is the United Nations?" by Claudia Rosett [April], the Better World Fund, an arm of the United Nations Foundation, is said to have spent more than $110 million lobbying the U.S. Congress over the last eight years. As reported to the IRS, the figure of $110 million pertains to total expenditures on what the fund's website describes as "outreach, communications, and advocacy" intended to "support UN causes"; of this, the amount devoted to lobbying Congress is approximately $3 million. We regret the error.—ED.

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The editors and staff of Commentary join the members of the Commentary Publication Committee in saluting the American Jewish Committee (AJC) as it celebrates 100 years of accomplishment on the global scene.

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Neal Kozodoy
Editor

Michael W. Schwartz
Chairman,
Commentary Publication Committee

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Commentary
May 2006

Three Reasons Not to Bomb Iran—Yet

Edward N. Luttwak

I KNOW OF no reputable expert in the United States or in Europe who trusts the constantly repeated promise of Iran's rulers that their nuclear program will be entirely peaceful and is meant only to produce electricity. The question is what to do about this. Faced with the alarming prospect of an Iran armed with nuclear weapons, some policy experts favor immediate preventive action, while others, of equal standing, invite us to accept what they consider to be inevitable in any case. The former call for the bombing of Iran's nuclear installations before they can produce actual weapons. The latter, to the contrary, urge a diplomatic understanding with Iran's rulers in order to attain a stable relationship of mutual deterrence.

Neither position seems adequately to recognize essential Iranian realities or American strategic priorities. To treat Iran as nothing more than a set of possible bombing targets cannot possibly be the right approach. Still more questionable is the illogical belief that a regime that feels free to attack American interests in spite of its present military inferiority would somehow become more restrained if it could rely on the protective shield of nuclear weapons.

In contemplating preventive action, the technical issue may be quickly disposed of. Some observers, noting that Iran's nuclear installations consist of hundreds of buildings at several different sites, including a number that are recessed in the ground with fortified roofs, have contended that even a prolonged air campaign might not succeed in destroying all of them. Others, drawing a simplistic analogy with Israel's aerial destruction of Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor in June 1981, speak as if it would be enough to drop sixteen unguided bombs on a single building to do the job. The fact is that the targets would not be buildings as such but rather processes, and, given the aiming information now available, they could indeed be interrupted in lasting ways by a single night of bombing. An air attack is not a demolition contract, and in this case it could succeed while inflicting relatively little physical damage and no offsite casualties, barring gross mechanical errors that occur only rarely in these days of routine precision.

The greater question, however, is neither military nor diplomatic but rather political and strategic: what, in the end, do we wish to see emerge in Iran? It is in light of that long-term consideration that we need to weigh both our actions and their timing, lest we hinder rather than accelerate the emergence of the future we hope for. We must start by considering the special character of American relations with the country and people of Iran.

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II

THE LAST time the United States seriously considered the use of force in Iran, much larger operations were envisaged than the bombing of a few uranium-enrichment installations. The year was 1978, and the mission was so demanding that a complete light-infantry division would have been needed just as an advance guard to screen the build-up of the main forces. The projected total number of troops in action—most of them from Iran's U.S.-equipped and U.S.-trained army—would easily have exceeded the maximum total fielded by the United States and its allies in Iraq since 2003. Their mission: to defend the country from a Soviet thrust to the Persian Gulf, in which motor-rifle divisions would descend from the Armenian and Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republics to link up with airborne divisions sent ahead to seize the oil ports.

That long-ago bit of contingency planning reflected sound intelligence on the contemporary transformation of the Soviet army from a ponderous battering ram to a fast-paced maneuver force. In the end, to be sure, it turned out that not Iran but neighboring Afghanistan was the Soviet target. But there is no question that, in facing the adventurism of an exceedingly well-armed Soviet Union in its final stage of militarist decline, the government of Iran could rely on the protection of its American alliance, an alliance in place ever since the Truman administration blocked Stalin's attempt to partition the country in 1946. From then on, and even in the perilous circumstances envisaged in 1978, the United States stood ready to risk the lives of American troops to defend Iran—it was that important in American strategy.

At stake in those decades was not just Iran's oil, although that counted for much more in 1946 than it does now: there was as yet no oil production to speak of in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq was the only other oil exporter in the region. More significant than Iran's geology was, and is, its geography. During the cold war, its northern border on either side and across the waters of the Caspian Sea formed an essential segment of the Western perimeter of containment. Today, it is Iran's very long southern coastline that is of equal strategic importance, dominating as it does the entire Persian Gulf from its narrow southern entrance at the straits of Hormuz to the thin wedge of Iraqi territory at its head. All of the offshore oil- and gas-production platforms in the gulf, all the traffic of oil and gas tankers originating from the jetties of the Arabian peninsula and Iraq, are within easy reach of the Iranian coast.

Unchanging geographic realities thus favor a strategic alliance between the United States and Iran, with large benefits for each side. Only the strategic reach of the distant United States can secure Iran from the power of the Russians nearby—a power not in abeyance even now, as the recent nuclear diplomacy shows, and much more likely to revive in the future than to decline. Likewise, a friendly Iran can best keep troublemakers away from the oil installations on the Arab side of the gulf, where there are only weak and corrupt desert dynasties to protect them.

III

THE VEHEMENT rejection of the American alliance by the religious extremists in power ever since the fall of the Shah in 1979 therefore violates the natural order of things—damaging both sides, but Iran far more grievously. The cost to the people of Iran has been huge, starting with the 600,000 dead and the uncounted number of invalids from the 1980-88 war with Iraq, which American protection would certainly have averted, and continuing till now with the lost opportunities, disruptions, and inconveniences caused by the lack of normal diplomatic and commercial relations.

These impediments are so costly precisely because there is still so much interchange between the two sides, with Iranian-Americans traveling back and forth and not a few operating businesses in Iran while residing in the U.S., and vice-versa. Beyond that, millions of ordinary Iranians are keenly interested in all that is American, from youth fashions to democratic politics, and nothing can stop them from watching the Farsi-language television stations of Los Angeles; all attempts by Iran's rulers to prohibit the country's ubiquitous satellite antennas have failed.

That is part of a much wider loss of authority over Iranian society. The regime started off in 1979 with the immense prestige of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, initially the consensual leader of just about everyone in Iran: Westernizing liberals and traditionalist bazaar merchants, the modernizing middle classes and the urban poor, rural landlords angry at the Shah's land reforms and the peasant beneficiaries of those measures, old-line Tudeh Communists and anti-Communist radicals, and of course believing Muslims of every sort, from the moderately devout and quietist to the fanatical clerics of the more extreme theological schools.

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Except for the last-named, all the members of this broad coalition of the deluded were one by one excluded from any share of power, and then variously outlawed, imprisoned, executed, oppressed, marginalized, or simply ignored, leaving extremist clerics in full control. Initially, these still had Khomeini's authority to justify their power, and still enjoyed the traditional respect that many Iranians used to feel for the clerics of Shiite Islam. But that is entirely gone now, replaced by resentment and contempt.

Too many clerics have used their official government positions, or their control of confiscated property placed in Islamic trusts, to enrich themselves and their families. Too many have operated scams of all kinds, diverting oil revenues or overcharging the government not only to fund the hugely swollen theological schools whose hordes of pious idlers must be fed and clothed but also for their personal benefit. The most notorious of them all, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a low-ranking cleric by trade, twice president of the Islamic republic from 1989 to 1997, perennial candidate for another term, chairman of the unelected but powerful "Expediency Discernment Council," and a top adviser to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, is widely believed to have become Iran's richest man.

Under the Shah, corruption in government contracting notoriously added some 15 percent to the cost of everything that was bought, from fertilizers for the ministry of agriculture to helicopters. Now the graft is more like 30 percent; the family and cronies of the Shah, it turns out, were paragons of self-restraint as compared with the clerics. They now form an entire class of exploiters, with the result that a bitter anti-clericalism has become widespread in Iran as it never was before.

Having lost all its moral authority, the regime must survive on the power of coercion alone, derived from the brutish part-time Basij militia of poor illiterates and the full-time Pasdaran Inqilab, or "Revolutionary Guards," whose forces are structured in ground, air, and naval combat units but whose men can still be sent into action as enforcers against protesting civilians. With the rise of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the first non-cleric to win Iran's presidency and himself a former engineering officer in their ranks, the Pasdaran have become an important political faction as well as a military force, a political gendarmerie, and a business conglomerate.

It is one more symptom of the regime's degeneration that, although the Pasdaran are well paid by local standards, they complement their salaries by engaging in both legal and illegal business, from manufacturing to contraband across the Persian Gulf. The Pasdaran's naval arm operates fast patrol boats from seven Iranian ports and the Halul oil platform. They are used to smuggle in products from foreign hulls or from the port of Dubai, not only embargoed items for national purposes but also perfumes and other luxury products for private money-making.

IV

Nor is that all. Because of its ideology, as well as the imperatives of retaining power against the popular will, the regime is in permanent collision with the culture, or rather the cultures, of Iran.

Almost half of the country's population is not Persian. Yet, under an official Persian nationalism that dates back to the 1920's—it is the only aspect of the Shah's imperial regime that Ayatollah Khomeini and his successors have left entirely untouched—all other national cultures are suppressed and reduced to mere folklore. Only Persian-language teaching is allowed (except for Armenian-Christian and Jewish religious instruction), condemning all non-Persians to illiteracy in their own languages.

Of these non-Persians, the Kurds alone account for some 9 percent of Iran's population, and their national sentiments have certainly been strengthened by the example of virtual Kurdish independence in Iraq next door. As their demands for cultural autonomy become more forceful, something of an insurgency seems to have started in Kurdish-inhabited parts of northwestern Iran. Smaller nationalities, too, have recently engaged in acts of violent resistance, including the Arabs at 3 percent of Iran's population and the Baluch of the southeast at 2 percent.

Taken together, the Kurds, the Arabs, the Baluch, plus several other ethnicities (Turkmen, Lurs, Gilaki, and Mazandarani), whether in any way dissident or not, amount to a quarter of Iran's population. But another quarter at least is added by the Turkish-speaking Azeris. Although many Azeris, especially in Tehran, are thoroughly assimilated, many others increasingly affirm their Turkic national identity, and groups calling for cultural autonomy or even separation have become increasingly active among them. Ever since Azerbaijan, just across the border, gained its independence from the Soviet Union, the Azeris have had a national home of their own, and it is not Iran.

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Further fracturing the country's unity is the clerics' religious extremism. Their discriminatory practices arouse the resentment not only of such minor non-Islamic communities as the Bahais, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, who conjointly amount to less than 1 percent of the population, but also of the Sunni Muslims who account for some 10 percent. In Tehran, home to more than a million of them, Sunnis are not allowed to have their own mosque, as they have in Rome, Tel Aviv, and Washington, D.C. The last sustained attempt to build a Sunni mosque was blocked by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad when he was mayor of Tehran.

Ahmadinejad's advent as president marks, indeed, a definite shift—from the institutionalized religious extremism in place since the fall of the Shah in 1979 to a more strident ultra-extremism. True, under Iran's theocratic constitution the elected president must obey the "Supreme Leader," a cleric of at least ayatollah rank, just as the elected Majlis parliament is subordinated to the unelected "Council of Guardians." Hence the views of the previous president, the elegant, learned, and mostly moderate Seyyed Muhammad Khatami, mattered not at all, as was soon discovered by the Western officials who wasted their time in negotiating with him. But Khatami was powerless because he was out of step with a regime that was responding to its ever increasing unpopularity by becoming ever more extreme. Ahmadinejad, by contrast, exemplifies that very trend.

Although the world now knows him for his persistent denial of the Holocaust and his rants against Israel and Zionism, at home Ahmadinejad's hostility is directed not against Iran's dwindling Jewish community but against the Sunnis. Lately, moreover, his ultra-extremism has antagonized even many of his fellow Shiites: he is an enthusiastic follower of both Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, for whom all current prohibitions are insufficient and who would impose an even stricter Islamic puritanism, and of a messianic, end-of-days cult centered on the Jamkaran mosque outside the theological capital of Qum. More traditional believers are alarmed by the hysterical supplications of the Jamkaran pilgrims for the return of Abul-Qassem Muhammad, the twelfth imam who occulted himself in the year 941 and is to return as the mahdi, or Shiite messiah. More urgently they fear that in trying to "force" the return of the mahdi, Ahmadinejad may deliberately try to provoke a catastrophic external attack on Iran that the mahdi himself would have to avert.

The shift from everyday extremism to a more active ultra-extremism is also manifest in the persecution of heterodox Shiites, both the Ahl-e-Haqq of western Iran and the far more numerous Sufi brotherhoods, who were previously left alone even by the rigorously fanatical Ayatollah Khomeini. Now, by contrast, Sufi gathering places are forcibly closed or attacked, and a major center in Qum was recently demolished, with hundreds of protesting Sufi dervishes arrested in the process.

Far more important than any of this is the antipathy of the regime for the Persian majority culture itself. Relentlessly favoring an essentially Arab Islamic culture instead, it condemns—though it has not been able to suppress—such cherished pre-Islamic customs as the fire-jumping ceremony that precedes the Nowruz celebrations of the Zoroastrian new year each spring. More generally, it elevates its narrow Islamism above the achievements and legacy of one of the world's major civilizations, whose millennial influence in everything from poetry and music to monumental architecture, from the higher crafts of carpets and miniatures to cuisine, continues to be felt in a vast area from the Balkans to Bengal right across central Asia.

The cultural dimension of their identity is especially significant for the Persians of the Iranian diaspora. This vast and growing group comprises a handful of political exiles and millions of ordinary people who could have prospered in Iran, and made Iran prosperous, but for their refusal to live under the rule of religious fanatics. Their cultural identity is what gives them a strong sense of cohesion quite independently of the Islam they were born into. While only a few have converted to Christianity, or are seriously engaged in the Zoroastrian revival that is promoted by some exiles, the majority have reacted to the extremism of Iran's present rulers by becoming, in effect, post-Islamic—that is, essentially secular but for a sentimental attachment to certain prayers and rituals.

In this, the exiles are presaging the future of Iran itself.

V

IN CONTEMPLATING American military action against Iran, it is important to recall these fundamental realities—now submerged but bound to reassert themselves as fundamentals always do. For the inhabitants of Iran are human beings like the rest of us, and extremist norms can be imposed on them only by brute force. A valid analogy is with the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and

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Russia and, in China, the retreat of Communism from the economic to the political realm alone. In each of these cases, even after all the depredations, massacres, destructions, and claimed transformations of decades of Communist rule, local cultures and historic identities reemerged largely intact and essentially unchanged—except for the principled rejection of Communist ideology.

It will be just the same in Iran when the fanatics who now oppress the non-fanatical majority lose power, as they inevitably will in time. Along with the reemergence of the country's suppressed Westernization that dates back to the 1920's, along with the restoration of its own beloved secular Persian culture, one can reasonably expect the United States to return to the scene as Iran's natural ally. But not everything will be as it was before, for the long and bitter years of religious oppression will have engendered widespread disaffiliation from politicized Islam, with some interest in its apolitical variants and perhaps some conversions to milder faiths, and certainly with an irresistible demand to strip the clerics of all political or judicial power.

That, as it happens, is one excellent reason not to move forthwith to bomb Iran's nuclear installations. For the long-term consequences of any American military action cannot be disregarded. Iranians are our once and future allies. Except for a narrow segment of extremists, they do not view themselves as enemies of the United States, but rather as the exact opposite: at a time when Americans are unpopular in all other Muslim countries, most Iranians become distinctly more friendly when they learn that a visitor is American. They must not be made to feel that they were attacked by the very country they most admire, where so many of their own relatives and friends have so greatly prospered, and with which they wish to restore the best of relations.

There is a second good reason not to act precipitously. In essence, we should not bomb Iran because the worst of its leaders positively want to be bombed—and are doing their level best to bring that about.

When a once broadly popular regime is reduced to the final extremity of relying on repression alone, when its leadership degenerates all the way down from an iconic Khomeini to a scruffy Ahmadinejad, it can only benefit from being engaged or threatened by the great powers of the world. The clerics' frantic extremism reflects a sense of insecurity that is fully justified, given the bitter hostility with which they are viewed by most of the population at large. In a transparent political maneuver, Ahmadinejad tries to elicit nationalist support at home by provoking hostile reactions abroad, through his calls for the destruction of Israel, his clumsy version of Holocaust denial that is plainly an embarrassment even to other extremists, and, above all, his repeated declarations that Iran is about to repudiate the Non-Proliferation Treaty it ratified in 1970.

There is a third reason, too. The effort to build nuclear weapons started more than three decades ago, yet the regime is still years away from producing a bomb.

VI

IT WAS as far back as August 1974, when the overnight tripling of Iran's oil revenues seemed to offer boundless opportunities, that the Shah publicly announced his intention to fund the construction of 23 nuclear reactors with an electricity-producing capacity of 1,000 megawatts each—a huge total, enough to supply Iran's entire demand. His declared aim was to preserve the "noble" commodity of oil for the more valuable extraction of petrochemicals, instead of burning it as a furnace fuel.

That almost made economic sense at the time. Although many suspected—rightly—that the Shah's real aim was to acquire nuclear weapons (we now know that he was seeking to buy ballistic missiles as well), he did at least have a passingly plausible explanation. But that was before the immensity of Iran's natural-gas reserves became known. No such cover story can deceive anyone in 2006: with 812 trillion cubic feet of proven gas reserves (15 percent of the world's total), Iran can cheaply generate all the electricity it wants with gas turbines.

In 1975, the Shah contracted with the French for enriched uranium and with Germany's Kraftwerk Union consortium of Siemens and A.E.G. Telefunken, as well as with ThyssenKrupp, to build the first two pressurized light-water reactors and their generating units near Iran's major port city of Bushehr. Work progressed rapidly until July 1979, when, after an expenditure of some $2.5 billion, the Germans abandoned Bushehr because Iran's new revolutionary rulers refused to make an overdue progress payment of $450 million. It seems that Ayatollah Khomeini opposed nuclear devilry—and besides, anything done by the Shah was viewed with great suspicion.

At that point, one reactor (Bushehr I) was declared by the Germans to be 85-percent complete

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and the other (Bushehr II) 50-percent complete. Both were subsequently damaged during the war with Iraq that lasted until 1988, chiefly in air strikes flown by seconded French pilots. Siemens was asked to return to finish the work but, knowing that the German government would never allow the contract to proceed, refused.

Negotiations with the Russians began soon thereafter. But because of quarreling by different factions within Iran and protracted haggling with Minatom, the Soviet atomic-energy ministry, no agreement was reached until 1995, when Boris Yeltsin, by now the president of Russia, ignored American objections and approved the delivery of a VVER-1000 pressurized light-water reactor powered by slightly enriched uranium rods. Delivered as a single large module, the reactor was to be fitted into the Bushehr I building, which was to be quickly repaired, adapted, and completed by Iranian and Russian contractors.

But problems arose—more or less the same ones that might be encountered in remodeling a suburban kitchen, though on a somewhat larger scale. Today, some eleven years after the contract was signed, some 2,500 Russian technicians are still hard at work in famously hot Bushehr, and the reactor is still not quite ready. The United States, which originally opposed the Minatom contract, now accepts, presumably for good reason, that all is proceeding properly—the Russians alone are to process the uranium rods, and the level of Minatom's competence and efficiency has been adequately signaled by the pace of its performance so far.

Rather less is known about Iran's secret program to produce weapon-grade uranium by the centrifuge process, but there is no reason to believe that things are otherwise. What *is* known is that in 1995, the Pakistani thief and smuggler Abdul Qadeer Khan, who is regularly described as a scientist but who has never invented or developed anything at all, agreed to sell to Iran the complete centrifuge-technology package he had stolen from the European URENCO consortium. The package also included samples of Pakistani-made centrifuges, full-scale plans for a heavy-water and plutonium reactor and separation plant, and the drawings and calculations for a cannon-type uranium bomb that Pakistan had originally received from China.

Evidently not included in the package were the two first stages of the separation process—the straightforward crushing and leaching needed to extract concentrated natural uranium or "yellowcake" from uranium ore—and the less simple but not overly sophisticated chemical plant needed to convert yellowcake into the gas uranium hexafluoride, which is fed into centrifuges. But China made up for this lack in 1996, selling complete and detailed plans and blueprints to Iran after the United States successfully objected to the sale of the plant itself. It is now installed, big as life, near Isphahan, ready for use and evidently already tested. To judge by photographs, it could just as readily be incapacitated with fewer than twelve 1,000-pound bombs, though the target would have to be revisited periodically because chemical plants are easily repaired even after their seemingly spectacular destruction.

VII

BUT THE core technology in the Khan package was that of the centrifuges themselves. They were not the ultra-fast, carbon-fiber units that URENCO now uses but two early models: one built out of dense aluminum that is easier to manufacture with the right machinery, and the other built out of a more efficient maraging steel but harder to manufacture. Both derive from a 1957 German design that was itself an improved version of the original aluminum centrifuges developed in the postwar Soviet Union by captured German scientists.

The fissile U-235 isotope of uranium that is needed for bombs is only 1.26-percent lighter than the mass of U-238 that comprises 99.3 percent of natural uranium. To extract it, only very fast centrifuges are of any use, turning at the rate of at least 1,500 revolutions per second, a hundred times as fast as a domestic washing machine. Things that turn that fast easily break apart, and the detailed design is also far from simple: to reduce friction that would otherwise generate enough heat to melt the whole thing, the electrically powered rotor must spin in a vacuum, with a magnetic bearing. The Japanese, who are generally believed to be somewhat more advanced than the Iranians in such matters, encountered considerable difficulties with their centrifuge plant.

Nor could Khan possibly sell enough centrifuges to Iran: to separate U-235 for a bomb in any reasonable amount of time, many centrifuges must be set to work at once. With the design now in Iran's possession, it would take at least 1,000 centrifuges working around the clock for at least a year to produce enough U-235 for a single cannon-type uranium bomb. Those 1,000 centrifuges must first be manufactured and then connected by piping into

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so-called "cascades"—and they must not break down, as poorly made centrifuges certainly will. (Of the 164 centrifuges that Iran already had in motion when the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] shut down the cascade in November 2003, fully a third crashed when the electricity was turned off.) Nor is it easy to keep the cascade running correctly: because uranium hexafluoride becomes highly corrosive in contact with water vapor, it can easily perforate imperfect tubes—and any leaks will promptly damage more of the plant.

It is true that one potential obstacle to Iran's quest for U-235 did prove to be entirely insignificant. European firms, mostly German and Swiss, not only eagerly sold the high-strength aluminum, special maraging steel, electron-beam welders, balancing machines, vacuum pumps, machine tools, and highly specialized flow-forming machines for both aluminum and maraging steel centrifuges, but also trained Iranians in the use of all this equipment. Remarkably, or perhaps not, they were also willing to train Iranians in the processes specifically needed to manufacture centrifuges whose only possible purpose is to enrich uranium U-235. When the IAEA inspectors came around, they were able to read and photograph the labels on all the equipment, which neither the European manufacturers nor the Iranians had bothered to remove. It remains to be seen if any consequences will ensue.

Still, in spite of all the industrial assistance it received, it is not clear that the Iranian nuclear organization can manufacture centrifuge cascades of sufficient magnitude, efficiency, and reliability. There are many talented engineers among the Iranian exiles in the United States and elsewhere in the world, but perhaps not so many in Iran itself. Besides, demanding technological efforts require not just individual talents but well-organized laboratories and industrial facilities.

Organization is indeed Iran's weakest point, with weighty consequences: after a century of oil drilling, for example, the state oil company still cannot drill exploratory wells without foreign assistance. In another example, even though the U.S. embargo was imposed almost 25 years ago, local industry cannot reverse-engineer spare parts of adequate quality for U.S.-made aircraft, which must therefore remain grounded or fly at great peril—there have been many crashes. Similarly, after more than sixty years of experience with oil refining at Abadan, existing capacity still cannot be increased without the aid of foreign engineering contractors, while the building of new refineries with local talent alone is deemed quite impossible. Iran must import one third of the gasoline it consumes because it cannot be refined at home.

VIII

IN SUM, there is no need to bomb Iran's nuclear installations at this time. The regime certainly cannot produce nuclear weapons in less than three years, and may not be able to do so even then because of the many technical difficulties not yet overcome.

To this it might be objected that the nuclear program clearly has priority over everything else, and receives funding in huge amounts. That is true enough. Although there are no reliable expenditure numbers for Iran's nuclear program, there is no need of numbers to establish its sheer magnitude. When the secret installations and activities revealed in August 2002 are added to those already publicly known, the total is impressive. It includes the Saghand ore-processing plant and uranium mine, the Tehran nuclear research center with its (very old) U.S.-supplied 5-megawatt research reactor, the nuclear technology center at Isphahan with four small Chinese-supplied research reactors, the Isphahan zirconium-production plant, the Bonab atomic-energy research center, the Anarak nuclear-waste storage site near Yazd, the Ardekan nuclear fuel plant, the shuttered Lashkar Ab'ad laser isotope separation plant, the Parchim, Lavizan II, and Chalous development facilities that eluded inspection, the Yazd radiation processing center, and finally the four largest and most important installations: the Bushehr reactor, the Isphahan uranium-hexafluoride conversion plant, the heavy-water and plutonium reactor and separation plant at Arak near the Kara-Chai River, some 150 miles south of Tehran, and the huge Natanz centrifuge complex between Isphahan and Kashan (at 33°43'24.43" N, 51°43'37.55"E, in case any friendly pilot should ask).

The last-named facility contains more than two dozen separate buildings within a perimeter of 4.7 miles, but of greatest interest are the two huge underground halls of 250,000 square feet each. Built with walls six feet thick and supposedly protected by two concrete roofs with sand and rocks in between—impressive to contemplate even if no dice against today's penetrating munitions—these halls are large enough to hold as many centrifuges as the Iranians could possibly want to make any number of uranium bombs or for that matter to fuel many reactors, always assuming of course that they can

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successfully manufacture, assemble, and operate centrifuge cascades.

That they can indeed do so is what Iranian spokesmen themselves now claim, and none more emphatically than Ahmadinejad, who insists that his countrymen have already mastered all the required processes and techniques. But is he right? He does possess a Ph.D. in engineering—won, however, in a special program for Pasdaran veterans and in the field of urban traffic management rather than nuclear engineering. What undermines confidence in Ahmadinejad's opinion is his rather expansive way with the facts, including his repeated assertion that the centrifuge technology was developed by Iranians in Iran and is "the proud achievement of the Iranian nation"—somehow overlooking the 99.99 percent of it that was purchased from A.Q. Khan.

Ahmadinejad aside, even casual observers must wonder how the world knows so much, in such exceptional detail, about Iran's once secret nuclear program, certainly as compared with what it knows of North Korea's program or what it knew of Iraq's at any point in time. Moreover, only a fraction of what it knows about the installations and processes at Arak, Isphahan, Natanz, and all the other places was uncovered by the much-advertised inspections of the IAEA; the recent Nobel Peace Prize won by its director Mohamed ElBaradei must have been a reward for effort rather than achievement. Satellite photography, too, is only part of the explanation, because one needs to know exactly where to look before it can be useful.

The conclusion is inescapable that among the scientists, engineers, and managers engaged in Iran's nuclear program—most of whom no doubt hold the same opinion of their rulers as do almost all educated Iranians—there are some who feel and act upon a higher loyalty to humanity than to the nationalism that the regime has discredited. Iran's regime, extremist but not totalitarian, does not and cannot control the movement of people and communications in and out of the country as North Korea does almost completely, and as Iraq did in lesser degree.

IX

BECAUSE OF the continuing flow of detailed and timely information out of Iran, it is possible both to overcome the regime's attempts at dispersion, camouflage, and deception and—if that should become necessary—to target air strikes accurately enough to delay Iran's manufacture of nuclear weapons very considerably. At the same time, there is no reason to attack prematurely, because there will be ample time to do so before it is too late—that is, before enough fissile material has been produced for one bomb.

And that brings us back to the beginning. What gives great significance to the factor of time is the advanced stage of the regime's degeneration. High oil prices and the handouts they fund now help to sustain the regime—but then it might last even without them, simply because of the power of any dictatorship undefeated in war. There is thus no indication that the regime will fall before it acquires nuclear weapons. Yet, because there is still time, it is not irresponsible to hope that it will.

By the same token, however, it is irresponsible to argue for coexistence with a future nuclear-armed Iran on the basis of a shared faith in mutual deterrence. How indeed could deterrence work against those who believe in the return of the twelfth imam and the end of life on earth, and who additionally believe that this redeemer may be forced to reveal himself by provoking a nuclear catastrophe?

But it is not necessary to raise such questions in order to reject coexistence with a nuclear Iran under its present leaders. As of now, in early 2006, with American and allied ground and air forces deployed on both sides of Iran in Afghanistan and Iraq, with powerful U.S. naval forces at sea to its south, with their own armed forces in shambles and no nuclear weapons, the rulers of Iran are openly financing, arming, training, and inciting anti-American terrorist organizations and militias at large. Under very thin cover, they are doing the same thing within neighboring Iraq, where they pursue a logic of their own by helping Sunni insurgents who kill Shiites, as well as rival Shiite militias that fight one another.

If this is what Iran's extremist rulers are doing now even without the shield of nuclear weapons to protect them, what would they do if they had it? Even more aggression is the only reasonable answer, beginning with the subversion of the Arabian oil dynasties, where very conveniently there are Shiite minorities to be mobilized.

These, then, are the clear boundaries of prudent action in response to Iran's vast, costly, and most dangerous nuclear program. No premature and therefore unnecessary attack is warranted while there is still time to wait in assured safety for a better solution. But also and equally, Iran under its present rulers cannot be allowed finally to acquire nuclear weapons—for these would not guarantee stability by mutual deterrence but would instead threaten us with uncontrollable perils.

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Europe's Two Culture Wars

George Weigel

At the height of the morning commute on March 11, 2004, ten bombs exploded in and around four train stations in Madrid. Almost 200 Spaniards were killed, and some 2,000 wounded. The next day, Spain seemed to be standing firm against terror, with demonstrators around the country wielding signs denouncing the "murderers" and "assassins." Yet things did not hold. Seventy-two hours after the bombs had strewn arms, legs, heads, and other body parts over three train stations and a marshaling yard, the Spanish government of José María Aznar, a staunch ally of the United States and Great Britain in Iraq, was soundly defeated in an election that the socialist opposition had long sought to turn into a referendum on Spain's role in the war on terror.

So, evidently, had the al-Qaeda operatives who set the bombs. A 54-page al-Qaeda document, which came to light three months after the bombings, speculated that the Aznar government would be unable to "suffer more than two or three strikes before pulling out [of Iraq] under pressure from its own people." In the event, it was one strike and out—as it was for the Spanish troops in Iraq who were withdrawn shortly thereafter, just as the newly elected prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, had promised on the day after Spanish voters chose appeasement.

Earlier this year, five days short of the second anniversary of the Madrid bombings, the Zapatero government, which had already legalized marriage between and adoption by same-sex partners and sought to restrict religious education in Spanish schools, announced that the words "father" and "mother" would no longer appear on Spanish birth certificates. Rather, according to the government's official bulletin, "the expression 'father' will be replaced by 'Progenitor A,' and 'mother' will be replaced by 'Progenitor B.'" As the chief of the National Civil Registry explained to the Madrid daily *ABC*, the change would simply bring Spain's birth certificates into line with Spain's legislation on marriage and adoption. More acutely, the Irish commentator David Quinn saw in the new regulations "the withdrawal of the state's recognition of the role of mothers and fathers and the extinction of biology and nature."

At first blush, the Madrid bombings and the Newspeak of "Progenitor A" and "Progenitor B" might seem connected only by the vagaries of electoral politics: the bombings, aggravating public opinion against a conservative government, led to the installation of a leftist prime minister, who then proceeded to do many of the things that aggressively secularizing governments in Spain have tried to do in the past. In fact, however, the nexus is more

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complex than that. For the events of the past two years in Spain are a microcosm of the two interrelated culture wars that beset Western Europe today.

The first of these wars—let us, following the example of Spain's birth certificates, call it "Culture War A"—is a sharper form of the red state/blue state divide in America: a war between the postmodern forces of moral relativism and the defenders of traditional moral conviction. The second—"Culture War B"—is the struggle to define the nature of civil society, the meaning of tolerance and pluralism, and the limits of multiculturalism in an aging Europe whose below-replacement-level fertility rates have opened the door to rapidly growing and assertive Muslim populations.

The aggressors in Culture War A are radical secularists, motivated by what the legal scholar Joseph Weiler has dubbed "Christophobia."[1] They aim to eliminate the vestiges of Europe's Judeo-Christian culture from a post-Christian European Union by demanding same-sex marriage in the name of equality, by restricting free speech in the name of civility, and by abrogating core aspects of religious freedom in the name of tolerance. The aggressors in Culture War B are radical and jihadist Muslims who detest the West, who are determined to impose Islamic taboos on Western societies by violent protest and other forms of coercion if necessary, and who see such operations as the first stage toward the Islamification of Europe—or, in the case of what they often refer to as *al-Andalus*, the restoration of the right order of things, temporarily reversed in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella.

The question Europe must face, but which much of Europe seems reluctant to face, is whether the aggressors in Culture War A have not made it exceptionally difficult for the forces of true tolerance and authentic civil society to prevail in Culture War B.

WESTERN EUROPE's descent into the languors of "depoliticization," as some analysts have called it, once seemed a matter of welfare-state politics, socialist economics, and protectionist trade policy, flavored by irritating EU regulations on everything from the circumference of tomatoes to the care and feeding of Sardinian hogs. And indeed there has been no let-up in Europe's seeming determination to bind itself ever more tightly in the cords of bureaucratic regulation. Thus, visitors to Poland after its 2004 accession to the EU could not help noticing that every egg sold in Polish grocery stores now bore an official, multi-digit EU numeric code, and every Polish sheep had an official EU tag stapled to one of its ears. Then there is Big Brother's regulation of the workplace. Last year, thanks to the EU's "Schedule Six of the Working-at-Heights Directive," electricians in the British village of Eccles, Suffolk, were precluded from using ladders to change five light bulbs in the ceiling of St. Benet's church. An enormous scaffolding had to be erected, and the cost of the two-day job worked out to about $500 per bulb.

What does all this have to do with Culture War A? The plain fact is that even as Europe's regulatory passions continue to bear deleterious economic consequences, they have also been sharpened to a harder ideological edge, not least where religion is concerned. Last October, for example, the official custodians of Dutch orthographic probity decreed that, beginning in August 2006, "Christ" will henceforth be written with a lower-case "c," while "Jews" (*Joden*) will be spelled with a capital "J" when denominating nationality and a lower-case "j" when indicating members of a religion. Earlier this year, an atheist math teacher in Scotland won an anti-discrimination case after claiming that his application for a "pastoral-care post" at a Catholic school had been declined on the grounds that the school reserved such positions for Catholics.

In part, then, Culture War A represents a determined effort on the part of secularists, using both national and EU regulatory machinery, to marginalize the public presence and impact of Europe's dwindling numbers of practicing Christians. Relatedly, it also involves crucial questions about the beginning and end of life, nowhere more sharply posed than in the no-longer-tradition-bound Low Countries. The Netherlands has long enjoyed a reputation for legalized libertinism involving drugs and prostitution, while also leading Europe along the path to euthanasia and same-sex marriage. Now, the formerly stolid Belgians seem determined to catch up. In addition to matching their Dutch neighbors' embrace of same-sex marriage and euthanasia—half the infant deaths in Flanders in 1999-2000 were from euthanasia—the socialist/liberal coalition governing the country recently adopted legislation permitting rent-a-uterus procreation.[2] As the Italian philosopher and government minister Rocco Buttiglione has put it, "Once, we used to quote Karl Marx when protesting against the 'alienation,' 'ob-

[1] See my article, "The Cathedral and the Cube: Reflections on European Morale," COMMENTARY, June 2004, and my subsequent book, *The Cube and the Cathedral*, recently released in a revised paperback edition by Basic Books.

[2] A legal struggle ensued when one incubator-mother, who had been impregnated by the seed of a member of a homosexual couple, found a better buyer while the child she had conceived was still gestating, and sold the unborn child to a traditional couple.

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jectification,' and 'commercialization' of human life. Can it be possible that, today, the Left is inscribing on its banners precisely the right to commercialize human beings"—and all in the name of tolerance and equality?

Culture War A finds expression as well in efforts to coerce and impose behaviors deemed progressive, compassionate, non-judgmental, or politically correct in extreme feminist or multiculturalist terms. In recent years, this has typically taken the form of EU member-states legally regulating, and thus restricting, public speech. Morally critical comments about homosexual behavior, for example, have been deemed "hate speech," and a French parliamentarian was fined for saying that heterosexuality is morally superior to homosexuality.

At the transnational level, pressure from the EU recently brought down the governing coalition in one of the EU's new members, Slovakia. The issue was a concordat with the Vatican stipulating that Slovakia would respect the decision of doctors who, for reasons of moral conviction, chose not to perform abortions. This provision was bitterly attacked by the EU's Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Human Rights, which held that the right to abort a child is an international human right and that therefore medical professionals cannot be permitted *not* to participate in the procedure. The ensuing debate in Bratislava over the risks of offending the human-rights mandarins of Brussels and Strasbourg destabilized the government to the point where the prime minister had to dissolve parliament and call new elections.

This creeping authoritarianism was also evident in a January 2006 resolution of the European Parliament condemning as "homophobic" those states which do not recognize same-sex marriage and referring to religious freedom as a "source of discrimination." During the debate on that resolution, a British Euro-MP, equating traditional marriage laws with a "breach [of] the human rights of gay and lesbian people," raised the specter of the suspension of EU membership against dissenting countries like Poland and Lithuania. Poland was also threatened with a suspension of its voting rights in the EU's ministerial meetings if it were to reinstitute capital punishment.

Whatever else might be said about these developments, that Europe should find itself, at this particular moment in its history, embroiled in a sharp-edged conflict over the legal imposition of political correctness must strike even the friendliest observer as a bizarre distraction from the most dramatic fact about the continent in the early 21st century: Europe is committing demographic suicide, and has been doing so for some time.

In the late 20th century, some environmental extremists confidently predicted that, as the world ran out of various things—gold, zinc, tin, mercury, petroleum, copper, lead, natural gas, and so forth—humanity would be crushed beneath rampant "overpopulation." At the beginning of the 21st century, the world is still chock-full of natural resources. Europe, however, is running out of the most crucial resource—people.

The overall picture is sobering enough. Not a single EU member has a replacement-level fertility rate, i.e., the 2.1 children per woman needed to maintain a stable population. Moreover, eleven EU countries—including Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, and all three Baltic states—display "negative natural increase" (i.e., more annual deaths than births), a clear step down into a demographic death-spiral.

These figures are striking enough in the aggregate. But the devil is in the details, which graphically illustrate what happens when a continent healthier, wealthier, and more secure than ever before declines to produce the human future in the most elemental sense. Thus, barring a sharp reversal, the same Belgians who are adopting ever more advanced forms of political correctness will see their population drop from 8 million in 2001 to 7 million in 2020 (a decline of 12.5 percent); by mid-century, Belgium could be home to as few as 4.5 million people. The Spaniards whose government is busily dismantling traditional social and cultural life may see their population cut by almost 25 percent by 2050.

In Germany, neither last year's election campaign nor the recently installed Christian Democratic government of Angela Merkel has addressed the impending distress of Germany's state health-care and pension systems, in which a shrinking number of taxpaying workers will have to support an increasing number of retirees. Meanwhile, thanks to the same demographic trends, Germany will likely lose the equivalent of the entire population of the former East Germany by mid-century. Although German president Horst Köhler has publicly campaigned for raising the country's fertility rate, now standing at 1.39, a recent poll indicates that 25 percent of German men and 20 percent of German women in their twenties intend to have no children—and see no problem with that choice.

Then there is Italy, whose large extended families have long been a staple of the world's imagina-

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tion. The truth of the matter is far different: by 2050, on present trends, almost 60 percent of Italians will not know, from personal experience, what a brother, sister, aunt, uncle, or cousin is. But this is perhaps not surprising in a country in which the average age of a man at the birth of his first child is thirty-three and the number of those over sixty-five considerably exceeds the number of those under fifteen. (Germany, Spain, Portugal, and Greece also have more over-sixty-fives than under-fifteens.) Nor is the meltdown limited to "Old Europe"; by 2050 Bulgaria's population is projected to fall by 36 percent, and Estonia's by 52 percent.

Over the next quarter-century, the number of workers in Europe will decline by 7 percent while the number of over-sixty-fives will increase by 50 percent, trends that will create intolerable fiscal difficulties for the welfare state across the continent. The resulting inter-generational strains will place great pressures on national politics, and those pressures may, in a variety of ways, put paid to the project of "Europe" as it has been envisioned ever since the European Coal and Steel Community, the institutional forerunner of today's European Union, was established in 1952. Demography is destiny, and Europe's demographics of decline—which are unparalleled in human history absent wars, plagues, and natural catastrophes—are creating enormous and unavoidable problems.

EVEN MORE ominously, Europe's demographic free-fall is the link between Culture War A and Culture War B.

History abhors vacuums, and the demographic vacuum created by Europe's self-destructive fertility rates has, for several generations now, been filled by a large-scale immigration from throughout the Islamic world. For anyone who has taken the trouble to look, the most obvious effects of that immigration have been on display in continental Europe's increasingly segregated urban landscape, in which an impoverished Muslim suburban periphery typically surrounds an affluent European urban core.

Far more has changed than the physical appearance of European metropolitan areas, though. There are dozens of "ungovernable" areas in France: Muslim-dominated suburbs, mainly, where the writ of French law does not run and into which the French police do not go. Similar extraterritorial enclaves, in which *shari'a* law is enforced by local Muslim clerics, can be found in other European countries. Moreover, as Bruce Bawer details in a new book, *While Europe Slept*,[3] European authorities pay little or no attention to practices among their Muslim populations that range from the physically cruel (female circumcision) through the morally cruel (arranged and forced marriages) to the socially disruptive (remanding Muslim children back to radical madrassas in the Middle East, North Africa, and Pakistan for their primary and secondary education) and the illegal ("honor" killings in cases of adultery and rape—the rape victim being the one killed).

Indeed, it is not simply a case of European governments choosing to avert their gaze from such things. Europe's welfare systems generously *support* immigrants who despise their host countries or turn violently against them—most notably, in the London Underground and bus bombings of July 7, 2005. As Melanie Phillips writes in *Londonistan*,[4] the London bombers were

> British boys, the product of British schools and universities and the British welfare state, [who] behaved in a way that repudiated not just British values but the elementary codes of humanity. Nor were they oddball loners. What had caused them to go onto the Tube with their backpacks and blow themselves and their fellow Britons to bits was an ideology that had taken hold like a cancer, not just in the *madrassas* of Pakistan but in the streets of Leeds and Bradford, Oldham and Leicester, Glasgow and Luton.

Thanks, moreover, to the liberality of European criminal law, seditious Muslim criminals are often treated in ways that seem reminiscent of the Red Queen's world of "impossible things before breakfast." Thus, Muhammad Bouyeri, the Dutch-Indonesian who murdered the filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 in the middle of an Amsterdam street and then affixed a personal fatwa to his victim's chest with a kitchen knife, retains the right to vote—and could, if he wished, run for the Dutch parliament. Meanwhile, at least two Dutch parliamentarians critical of Islamist extremism have been forced by Islamist threats to live in prisons or army compounds under police or military guard.

Sixty years after the end of World War II, the European instinct for appeasement is alive and well. French public swimming pools have been segregated by sex because of Muslim protests. "Piglet" mugs have disappeared from certain British retailers after Muslim complaints that the A.A. Milne character was offensive to Islamic sensibilities. So

[3] Doubleday, 248 pp., $23.95.

[4] Encounter, 214 pp., $25.95.

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have Burger King chocolate ice-cream swirls, which reminded some Muslims of Arabic script from the Qur'an. Bawer reports that the British Red Cross banished Christmas trees and nativity scenes from its charity stores for fear of offending Muslims. For similar reasons, the Dutch police in the wake of the van Gogh murder destroyed a piece of Amsterdam street art that proclaimed "Thou shalt not kill"; schoolchildren were forbidden to display Dutch flags on their backpacks because immigrants might think them "provocative."

The European media frequently censor themselves in matters relating to domestic Islamic radicalism and crimes committed by Muslims, and, with rare exceptions, their coverage of the war against terrorism makes the American mainstream media look balanced. When domestic problems related to Muslim immigrants do come to light, the typical European reaction, according to Bawer, is usually one of self-critique. In Malmö, Sweden, the country's third-largest city, rapes, robberies, school-burnings, "honor" killings, and anti-Semitic agitation got so out of hand that large numbers of native Swedes reportedly moved out; the government blamed Malmö's problems instead on Swedish racism, and chastised those who had wrongly conceived of integration in "two hierarchically ordered categories, a 'we' who shall integrate and a 'they' who shall be integrated."

Belgium, for its part, has established a governmental Center for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEEOR) that recently sued a manufacturer of security garage gates whose Moroccan employees work only in the factory and are not sent out to install the gates in Belgian homes. By contrast, according to the Belgian journalist Paul Belien, whose online "Brussels Journal" (www.brusselsjournal.com) is an important source of information on Europe's culture wars, CEEOR declined to prosecute a Muslim who created an anti-Semitic cartoon series, on the grounds that doing so would "inflame the situation."

Perhaps predictably, European Jews have frequently played the role of the canary in the mineshaft amid the trials of Islamic integration. Two years ago, a Parisian disc jockey was brutally murdered, his assailant crying "I have killed my Jew. I will go to heaven." That same night, another Muslim murdered a Jewish woman while her daughter watched, horrified. Yet at the time, as the columnist Mark Steyn has written, "no major French newspaper carried the story" of these homicides. This past February, the French media did report on the gruesome murder of a twenty-three-year old Jewish man, Ilan Halimi, who had been tortured for three weeks by an Islamist gang; his screams under torture were heard by his family during phone calls demanding ransom while, Steyn reports, "the torturers read out verses from the Qur'an." He quotes one police detective shrugging off the jihadist dimension of the horror by saying that it was all rather simple: "Jews equal money."

These patterns of sedition and appeasement finally came to global attention earlier this year in the Danish-cartoons jihad. The cartoons themselves, depicting Muhammad, caused little comment in Denmark or anywhere else when they were originally published last year in the Copenhagen daily *Jyllands-Posten*. But after Islamist Danish imams began agitating throughout the Middle East (aided by three additional and far more offensive cartoons of their own devising), an international furor erupted, with dozens of people killed by rioting Muslims in Europe, Africa, and Asia. As Henrik Bering put it in the *Weekly Standard*, "the Danes were suddenly the most hated people on earth, with their embassies under attack, their flag being burned, and their consciousness being raised by lectures on religious tolerance from Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other beacons of enlightenment."

The response from Europe, in the main, was to intensify appeasement. Thus the Italian "reforms minister," Roberto Calderoli, was forced to resign for having worn a T-shirt featuring one of the offending cartoons—a "thoughtless action" that, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi deduced, had caused a riot outside the Italian consulate in Benghazi in which eleven people were killed. Newspapers that ran the cartoons were put under intense political pressure; some journalists faced criminal charges; websites were forced to close. The pan-European Carrefour supermarket chain, bowing to Islamist demands for a boycott of Danish goods, placed signs in its stores in both Arabic and English expressing "solidarity" with the "Islamic community" and noting, inelegantly if revealingly, "Carrefour don't carry Danish products." The Norwegian government forced the editor of a Christian publication to apologize publicly for printing the Danish cartoons; at his press conference, the hapless editor was surrounded by Norwegian cabinet ministers and imams. EU foreign minister Javier Solana groveled his way from one Arab nation to another, pleading that Europeans shared the "anguish" of Muslims "offended" by the Danish cartoons." Not to be outdone, the EU's justice minister, Franco Frattini, announced that the

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EU would establish a "media code" to encourage "prudence"—"prudence" being a synonym for "surrender," regardless of one's view of the artistic merits of, or the cultural sensitivity displayed by, the world's most notorious cartoons.

For all the blindness of the politicians who in the 1930's attempted to appease totalitarian aggression, they at least thought that they were thereby preserving their way of life. Bruce Bawer (following the researcher Bat Ye'or) suggests that 21st-century Europe's appeasement of Islamists amounts to a self-inflicted dhimmitude: in an attempt to slow the advance of a rising Islamist tide, many of Europe's national and transnational political leaders are surrendering core aspects of sovereignty and turning Europe's native populations into second- and third-class citizens in their own countries.

BAWER BLAMES Europe's appeasement mentality and its consequences on multiculturalist political correctness run amok, and there is surely something to that. For, in a nice piece of intellectual irony, European multiculturalism, based on postmodern theories of the alleged incoherence of knowledge (and thus the relativity of all truth claims), has itself become utterly incoherent, not to say self-contradictory.

Take, for example, the case of Iqbal Sacranie, general secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, whom Prime Minister Tony Blair appointed as one of his advisers on Muslim affairs and for whom Blair procured a knighthood. In a series of episodes that indeed seem like something from beyond Lewis Carroll's looking glass, Sir Iqbal soon went on the BBC to announce that homosexuality "damages the very foundation of society"; following the protests of a British gay lobby, he was investigated by the "community safety unit" of Scotland Yard, whose mandate includes "hate crimes and homophobia"; then, when a Muslim lobby demanded that Blair scrap the "Holocaust Memorial Day" he had created several years earlier, Sir Iqbal backed the demand, informing the *Daily Telegraph* that "Muslims feel hurt and excluded that their lives are not equally valuable to those lives lost in the Holocaust time."

Yet to blame "multi-culti" p.c. for Europe's paralysis is to remain on the surface of things. Culture War A—the attempt to impose multiculturalism and "lifestyle" libertinism in Europe by limiting free speech, defining religious and moral conviction as bigotry, and using state power to enforce "inclusivity" and "sensitivity"—is a war over the very meaning of tolerance itself. What Bruce Bawer rightly deplores as out-of-control political correctness in Europe is rooted in a deeper malady: a rejection of the belief that human beings, however inadequately or incompletely, can grasp the truth of things—a belief that has, for almost two millennia, underwritten the European civilization that grew out of the interaction of Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome.

Postmodern European high culture repudiates that belief. And because it can only conceive of "your truth" and "my truth" while determinedly rejecting any idea of "the truth," it can only conceive of tolerance as indifference to differences—an indifference to be enforced by coercive state power, if necessary. The idea of tolerance as *engaging* differences within the bond of civility (as Richard John Neuhaus once put it) is itself regarded as, well, intolerant. Those who would defend the true tolerance of orderly public argument about contending truth claims (which include religious and moral convictions) risk being driven, and in many cases are driven, from the European public square by being branded as "bigots."

But the problem goes deeper still. For one thing, however loudly European postmodernists may proclaim their devotion to the relativity of all truths, in practice this translates into something very different—namely, the deprecation of traditional Western truths, combined with a studied deference to non- or anti-Western ones. In the relativist mindset, it thus turns out, not *all* religious and moral conviction is bigotry that must be suppressed; only the Judeo-Christian variety is. In short, the moral relativism of Europe is often mere window-dressing, a mask for Western self-hatred.

For another, related thing, Europe's soul-withering skepticism goes hand in hand with what Allan Bloom once styled "debonair nihilism"—a nihilism that, in its indifference to everything beyond the imperial self, has made its own contribution to the continent's unwillingness to create the future by creating successor generations. Bruce Bawer left America for Europe because of what he saw as the baleful influence of the religious Right on American politics, and because Europe was far more "open" than the United States to same-sex marriage. He cannot seem to grasp that what made Europe attractive to those like himself—its putative moral openness—is what has made it so vulnerable to radical Islam.[5]

[5] In another new book, *Menace in Europe* (Crown Forum, 261 pp., $25.95), Claire Berlinski aptly quotes the French thinker Chantal Delsol on the philosophical origins of today's appeasement mentality in Europe: "Our contemporary cannot imagine for what cause he would sacrifice his life because he does not know what his life means."

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Bawer suggests that Europe can regain its nerve, and defend its free societies, by rejecting multicultural political correctness while retaining the political expression of skepticism and relativism: freedom concretized in law as radical personal autonomy. But it is radical personal autonomy that has helped lead Europe into steep demographic decline; it is radical personal autonomy that has brought Europe to denigrate its own civilizational achievements, seeing in its history only repression and intolerance; and it is radical personal autonomy that underwrites political correctness and its corrosive effects on Europe's capacity to defend itself against internal Islamist aggression.

A DIFFERENT AND much more persuasive analysis of Europe's culture wars has emerged from a remarkable dialogue that took place in 2004. The partners in this conversation may seem an unlikely pair: Marcello Pera, an agnostic Italian academic turned politician (and president of the Italian Senate), and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the principal theological agency of the Catholic Church.

Pera had given a lecture on "Relativism, Christianity, and the West" at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University; Ratzinger, at Pera's invitation, gave a lecture in the Italian Senate on "The Spiritual Roots of Europe." The two men then agreed to exchange letters exploring the striking convergence of analysis that had characterized their two lectures. Both the lectures and the letters were published in a small book in Italy in early 2005 and created something of a stir, which only intensified in April when Joseph Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI. The Ratzinger/Pera volume has now been published in the United States under the title *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*.[6]

Long before becoming pope, Joseph Ratzinger, a widely respected intellectual who had succeeded the late Andrei Sakharov in the latter's chair at the prestigious French *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, had been warning his fellow Europeans that their dalliance in the intellectual sandbox of postmodernism was going to cause severe problems for their societies and their polities. Those problems, he argues here, are at once intellectual, spiritual, and moral. The "crumbling of [European] man's original certainties about God, himself, and the universe" has led to "the decline of a moral conscience grounded in absolute values" and to the "real danger" of "the self-destruction of the European conscience." Why is it, Ratzinger asks, that Europe "has lost all capacity for self-love"? Why is it that Europe can see in its own history only "the despicable and the destructive . . . [and] is no longer able to perceive what is great and pure"?

Europe's secularists have heard critiques like Ratzinger's before, and dismissed them as the special pleading of committed Christians. The welcome surprise in *Without Roots* is Marcello Pera's answer: in effect, a parallel critique from a self-described non-believer and philosopher of science. "Infected by an epidemic of relativism," Pera writes, Europeans believe "that to accept and defend their culture would be an act of hegemony, of intolerance, [betraying] an anti-democratic, anti-liberal, disrespectful attitude." But precisely this toxin has led them into "the prison house" of political correctness, a "cage" in which "Europe has locked itself . . . for fear of saying things that are not at all incorrect but rather ordinary truths, and to avoid facing its own responsibilities."

Pera is also blunt about Europe's unwillingness to defend itself against radical Islam. Do Europeans understand, he asks,

> that their very existence is at stake, their civilization has been targeted, their culture is under attack? Do they understand that what they are being called on to defend is their own identity? Through culture, education, diplomatic negotiations, political relations, economic exchange, dialogue, preaching, but also, if necessary, through force?

In his own essay in *Without Roots*, Ratzinger, adopting an idea from Toynbee, proposes that any renewal of Europe's civilizational morale can be effected only by "creative minorities" who will challenge secularism as the EU's de-facto ideology by means of a re-encounter with Europe's Judeo-Christian religious and moral heritage. For his part, Pera suggests that the needed "work of renewal . . . be done by Christians and secularists together." That work, he writes, will involve the development of a "*civil religion* that can instill its values throughout the long chain that goes from the individual to the family, groups, associations, the community, and civil society, *without* passing through the political parties, government programs, and the force of states, and therefore without affecting the separation, in the temporal sphere, of church and state" (emphases in the original).

Pera's proposal for this "civil religion" is left rather vague, but in February its contours came

[6] Basic Books, 159 pp., $22.00. I have contributed a foreword to this book.

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into somewhat clearer focus when he launched a new movement called "For the West, the Bearer of Civilization." The movement's manifesto begins by briskly describing Europe's two culture wars, goes on to affirm Western civilization as "a source of universal and inalienable principles," and commits its signatories (who include a center-Right spread of Italian intellectual and political figures) to a broad agenda of renewal: to "deprive [terrorism] of every justification and support"; to integrate immigrants "in the name of shared values"; to support "the right to life from conception until natural death"; to dismantle unnecessary bureaucracy; to "affirm the value of the family as a natural partnership based on marriage"; to spread "liberty and democracy as universal values"; to maintain the institutional separation of church and state "without giving in to the secular temptation of relegating the religious dimension solely to the individual sphere"; and to promote a healthy pluralism in education. The manifesto concludes with a call to arms and a warning: "People who forget their roots can be neither free nor respected."

IT REMAINS to be seen whether initiatives similar to Marcello Pera's, or analyses similar to those he has advanced in intellectual tandem with Pope Benedict, can begin to get a purchase on the cultural high ground in Europe. Some would argue that it is already too late, that the demographic tipping point has been reached and that, as Mark Steyn puts it, with "the successor population [i.e., Islam] already in place, . . . the only question is how bloody the transfer of real estate will be." But if Europe's two culture wars are not to result in the accelerated emergence of "Eurabia" (in Bat Ye'or's coinage), something resembling Pera's initiative will have to lead the way, and soon.

The alternative approach to Europe's future was graphically on display last August upon the death of Robin Cook, the former British foreign secretary (and critic of the Iraq war). The funeral service was held in the historic "High Kirk" of Edinburgh, St. Giles, and led by Bishop Richard Holloway, the erstwhile Anglican primate of Scotland, who some years ago wrote a book attempting to reconcile his readers to what he termed the "massive indifference of the universe." Holloway later described the funeral in these words: "Here was I, an agnostic Anglican, taking the service in a Presbyterian church, for a dead atheist politician. And I thought that was just marvelous."

Nihilism rooted in skepticism, issuing in the bad faith of moral relativism and Western self-loathing, comforting itself with a vacuous humanitarianism: not only is this not marvelous, it has contributed to killing Europe demographically, and to paralyzing Europe in the face of an aggressive ideology aimed at the eradication of Western humanism in the name of a lethally distorted understanding of God's will. Those who love Europe and what it has meant and still could mean for the world had better hope that Marcello Pera and his allies among believers, and not Bishop Holloway and his fellow debonair nihilists, are the ones who will prevail in the contest to resolve Europe's two culture wars.

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What Israel Did (and Did Not) Vote For

Hillel Halkin

ISRAEL'S POLITICAL system has a long history of mergers and fissures, with smaller parties joining to form larger ones and splitting again in new ways. Up to the day it was held, this year's March 28 election seemed certain to be remembered for the most recent and dramatic of such splits: Ariel Sharon's walking out of the Likud last November to form the new Kadima party, which his January stroke prevented him from leading in the campaign. Contemplating the election's returns, however, one wonders whether the real bolt wasn't a different one, in which the Israeli public walked out on national politics.

One might start with the fact that the turnout at the polls was a mere 63 percent, compared with 67 percent in 2003 and 62.3 percent in 2001, when the vote—which elected Ariel Sharon to his first term—was not for the Knesset but for prime minister alone. On the face of it, this may appear to be par for the course. Voter turnout has been low and dropping in Western democracies for decades. In post-World War II presidential elections in the United States, for example, turnout peaked at 63 percent in 1960 and fell steadily to 47 percent in 1996 before rebounding somewhat in 2000 and 2004. In French parliamentary elections, it dropped from 74 percent in 1945 to 60 percent in 2002. Seen from this perspective, Israel is part of a worldwide trend.

Yet, until very recently, Israel had not been part of this trend at all. Indeed, at the same time that voter participation was declining nearly everywhere else, it was holding steady or rising in Israel, hovering at slightly over 80 percent from 1955 to 1992 and reaching 84 percent in 1996 and 1999. This was a remarkably high rate, from which the drop-off of the last three elections has been precipitous.

Over this same period, Israel's voting patterns differed in another significant way as well. In the United States and Europe, two large parties—Republicans and Democrats, Conservatives and Laborites, Christian-Democrats and Socialists—have been the rule, with third parties like Great Britain's Liberals occasionally a factor. In Israel, for the first two-and-a-half decades after its establishment in 1948, a single party, the socialist Mapai of Prime Ministers David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, Levi Eshkol, and Golda Meir, dominated the 120-member Knesset and the government. Mapai won 46 seats in the elections of 1949, 45 in 1951, 47 in 1959, and so on, while its nearest competitor never passed 20 and the remainder of parliament was divided among a dozen smaller factions. Only in the elections of 1969 did the first signs of a two-party system emerge when an alliance of Mapai and other left-wing parties, the forerunner of today's Labor, garnered 56 Knesset seats, while a parallel

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merger of the two largest right-wing parties, forming the basis of what was to become Likud, won 26.

From then until the mid-1980's, what seemed to be a transition to a full-fledged two-party system proceeded apace. In 1973, Labor won 51 seats and Likud 39. In 1977, when the Right triumphed for the first time, Likud gained 43 seats and Labor 32. In 1981, it was Likud 48 and Labor 47, with these two parties accounting between them for four-fifths of the Knesset.

Yet this proved to be a high-water mark. In 1984 it was Labor 44, Likud 41; in 1988, Likud 40, Labor 39; in 1992, Labor 44, Likud 32; in 1996, Labor 34, Likud 32; in 1999, Labor 26, Likud 19; in 2003, Likud 38, Labor 19. From election to election, the joint share of Israel's two leading parties decreased, although rising temporarily in 2003.

And now we have 2006, with 29 seats for Kadima, 19 for Labor, and Likud a distant third at 12. Who are the other parties? Two of them, the Sephardi Shas (12 seats) and the Ashkenazi United Torah Judaism (6 seats), are ethno-Orthodox religious parties that seek neither to appeal to nor to represent Israelis who do not belong to their camps. Three others are Arab parties (10 seats), of which the same can be said. Still another party, Yisrael Beyteynu ("Israel Is Our Home," with 11 seats), draws most of its votes from Russian immigrants and is led by an ex-Russian immigrant himself. Another, the National Union-National Religious party (9 seats), ran as the political arm of the settler movement. And finally, with an astonishing 7 seats, there is the newest addition to the Knesset, the Pensioners party, which many Israelis had never heard of until election week and whose platform consisted entirely of a call for increased government aid to the elderly. (Having turned into the mascot of the disaffected in the campaign's last days, the Pensioners attracted a tongue-in-cheek protest vote.)

None of these, with the partial exception of Yisrael Beyteynu, ran on a program for the nation as a whole—an economic policy, a defense policy, a policy toward the Palestinians—because none conceived of the nation as a whole as its concern. Each not only was committed to furthering the interests of a specific population group but was indifferent to the interests of any group beside its own.

Thus, if to the 37 percent of Israelis who simply did not vote in March we add those who voted for single-constituency parties, including the 160,000 who supported twenty fly-by-night tickets that did not make it into the Knesset at all, we arrive at the bottom line that nearly two-thirds of Israel's voting-age citizens were prepared to accept politicians who had neither any plans nor any aspiration to govern them. These are the elections' most striking results.

WHY HAS this happened in a country with an electorate that was not long ago distinguished by its high sense of national responsibility? The reasons are, for the most part, well-known.

The lowering of the flame beneath Israel's "melting pot" is one. For all of its great difficulties, the period of massive immigration to Israel from Eastern Europe and the Arab lands in the late 1940's, 50's, and 60's succeeded remarkably well, at least on the surface, in forging out of highly disparate groups a single people with a strong national ethos. Becoming "Israeli," whatever that may have meant to different people, was something that nearly everyone strove to do, and the one significant part of the Jewish population that consciously resisted this process, its non- or anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox sector, stayed largely aloof from politics. Although this sector had its political parties, they, unlike the Zionist-oriented National Religious party, did not participate in coalition governments or expect much from them.

All this began slowly to change in the 1970's. Protest movements of "Sephardi pride" early in the decade were a harbinger. But it was only when Menachem Begin and the Likud campaigned victoriously in 1977 by appealing openly to the resentment of the "Ashkenazi establishment" felt by many Israelis with family origins in the Arab Middle East that identity politics arrived in Israel in a major way. And it was Begin, too, who enticed the ultra-Orthodox to join a government for the first time, thus turning them from passive to active players on the political scene.

In the 1980's the trend strengthened, abetted by multiculturalist tail winds from abroad and the growing rift between Left and Right over the occupied territories; this struck at the heart of the national consensus that Israelis had always prided themselves on when it came to major issues. A sign of the times was the founding of Tami or the Israeli Moroccan Movement, an openly ethnic party and the first successful one of its kind since 1951. Tami won three Knesset seats in 1981 and paved the way for Shas, which first ran in 1984 and rose to seventeen seats by 1999. Paralleling this trend was the growth and radicalization of Israel's Arab parties, the largest of which, the Democratic Front for Peace, originally the joint Jewish-Arab Israeli Communist party, gradually eliminated all Jews

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from its ranks. And when, at the end of the decade, a huge Jewish immigration began pouring in from the former Soviet Union, it did what no new large group of new immigrants had ever done before and launched a party of its own: Yisrael Be'Aliyah, headed by Natan Sharansky, which won 7 Knesset seats in the elections of 1996.

None of this would have happened, however, had it not been for Israel's traditional system of proportional representation, inherited from the Zionist politics of Europe and British-Mandate Palestine. In this system, voters cast their ballots not for candidates running as individuals in electoral districts but for nationwide lists presented by parties, each of which is then apportioned Knesset seats on the basis of the percentage of votes it obtains. (If party X wins 5 percent of the vote, for instance, it gets 120 x .05 or 6 seats, which go to the top six candidates on its list.) While not without its virtues, chief among which is the parliamentary voice it gives to minorities, proportional representation also has its grave defects. That is why, in its pure form, it is practiced in Israel and Holland alone, and in hybrid versions in only a few other countries like Finland, New Zealand, and Ireland.

One of these defects is that, in a country that is religiously, ethnically, or ideologically fractured, proportional representation can produce parliaments with many small parties and no dominating large ones, leading to complex and unstable governing coalitions that are difficult to establish and maintain. This is what has happened increasingly in Israel—a tendency exacerbated by an electoral reform law, first taking effect in 1996, that instituted a direct popular vote for the office of prime minister alongside party voting for the Knesset, which until then had itself chosen the prime minister. Although this law, which badly backfired, has now been repealed, its damage lived on after it, for it further encouraged Israelis to vote by sector for the Knesset while fulfilling their national duty, so they thought, in the vote for prime minister. Indeed, the only explanation for the sudden plunge in voter turnout in 2001, when a prime minister alone was elected, was that many Israelis no longer saw the point of voting at all when their sectoral interests and identity were not at stake.

But this is not proportional representation's worst feature. Even more serious is its severing of voters from the candidates elected by them. Whereas, for example, all Americans have a Congressman from their district and a Senator from their state who must take into account their needs, desires, and opinions, Israeli politics has no corresponding figures. Party X's Knesset members are not personally answerable to the public that chose them, which has no influence over them and may not even know who they are. Nor, having been chosen by their parties, can they be rewarded or punished on an individual basis. There is no way to return one member of party X to the Knesset for having done a good job while retiring another member of the same party for having done a bad one.

Such a system, clearly, is capable of producing a fundamental estrangement from politics. As long as Israelis, despite their differences, shared a strong sense of common national purpose, this was balanced by other forces; once Israeli society began to fragment, however, it became salient. And as it did, the effective response to it became identity politics—with ethnic, religious, or ideological constituency taking the place of geographical districts. By voting as members of a given community, with its formal and informal networks, it was possible for Israelis to monitor the performance of their politicians and exert some influence over them.

And the politicians reciprocated. A Republican Congressman understands that he represents his entire district; he must be attentive to Democrats, too, if only because he wants as many of their votes as he can get in the future. But a Knesset member from single-constituency party X feels no such obligation to voters for parties Y and Z. He may never have had the slightest contact with them, having gotten to be a Knesset member in the first place not by winning local elections and working his way up the political ladder but by being active in the population group that party X represents and cultivating its leaders. (Israel's only local elections are for mayor, and few mayors make the jump to the Knesset.) This in turn has discouraged good people from entering national politics, in which advancement depends largely on cronyism and connections. Little wonder, then, that Israelis, especially younger ones, have grown cynical about their politicians.

One could name still other factors that help explain electoral apathy and single-constituency voting in a country whose very existence—unlike that of most other Western democracies—may depend on the political decisions it makes. One thing in particular, however, deserves mention. This is the way in which the two leaders who, in recent years, took the boldest of national initiatives, Yitzhak Rabin and Ariel Sharon, only deepened the cynicism of the voters.

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Much has been said about Rabin's betrayal of his voters in 1993, when, after winning the 1992 elections on a platform of refusing to negotiate with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, he about-faced and signed the Oslo agreement with Yasir Arafat. Less remembered today is how in October 1995, a month before his assassination, he declared himself satisfied with the Knesset's ratification of Oslo's second stage by an acrimoniously contested vote of 61-59, even though the winning margin was provided by two anti-Israel Arab parties and two Jewish members of the right-wing Tsomet party who were politically bribed to cross the lines. Had the issue been one of lesser magnitude, Rabin's supporters might have argued that he was only doing what democratically elected politicians routinely do. But in a matter like this, which was of the profoundest national import, he was inexcusably violating the trust Israelis had put in him.

As if this were not bad enough, along came Ariel Sharon a decade later and did something perhaps even more reprehensible. In unveiling his Gaza disengagement plan, it will be recalled, Sharon, anxious to obtain the public mandate that Rabin had deemed unnecessary, announced that he was submitting the plan to a referendum of the members of his own Likud party. (Although his preference had been for a national referendum, in which pro-disengagement sentiment would have been much stronger, he abandoned the idea when advised that this would encounter legal and parliamentary obstacles.) The referendum was held in May 2004, and, contrary to initial expectations, disengagement lost by a wide margin—whereupon Sharon broke his promise to honor its results and pushed on with the plan anyway, thereby precipitating the party revolt against him that led to his leaving Likud and to its disastrous showing in March's elections.

The point is not whether one supported either the Oslo agreement or the Gaza disengagement. It is that, in both cases, an elected leader told his voters that what they had voted for, even if they had gone to the polls at his own special behest, was irrelevant. Can Israelis be blamed if, in deciding whether to take part in the recent elections, and then whether to prefer a party with a broad national agenda to one representing their own immediate clan, they took this lesson to heart?

DID EHUD OLMERT and Kadima receive from the Israeli public, as they and many commentators have argued, a "mandate" for further disengagement in the West Bank? Even disregarding the low turnout, it is hard to see how this can be maintained. Of all the parties running in the March elections, Kadima alone had disengagement on its platform—and it won less than a quarter of the vote. Moreover, it was precisely in the final weeks of the campaign, when Olmert and other party leaders grew more outspoken about their plans, declaring that an Israel governed by them would, by 2010, unilaterally withdraw from most of the West Bank to final borders determined by itself, that Kadima lost altitude quickly, slipping from the approximately 40 seats projected by the opinion polls to its electoral tally of 29.

Or, rather, were the elections—in the second sweeping generalization that has been made about them—a vote against the market-oriented economic policies of the Likud's current leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who was minister of finance in the Sharon government, and in favor of a return to and even an expansion of the costly social-welfare programs that Netanyahu had slashed? The Knesset seats won by the Jewish parties that campaigned openly against Netanyahu's "brutal capitalism," as they called it, add up to 43: 19 for Labor (the same as in 2003), 7 for the Pensioners, 5 for the left-wing Meretz (down 1 seat), and 12 for Shas (up 1 seat). This can hardly be interpreted as a landslide in favor of resurrecting Israel's old welfare-state economy.

In reality, sad to say, the March elections were not a "mandate" for anything. The most noteworthy thing about them was how poorly all three of the major national parties did. Although Kadima, which began the campaign on a wave of popular sympathy engendered by Sharon's stroke, received far fewer votes than expected, neither Labor nor Likud picked up a single one of these. Likud, which began the campaign with a projected result of 15 to 18 seats, sank to 12. Labor was given around 20 seats by the early polls, and that is what it ended up with. The many voters who abandoned Kadima as election day neared went elsewhere.

True, the formation of a Center-Left government based on Kadima, Labor, the Pensioners, and Meretz, with Shas, United Torah Judaism, and possibly Yisrael Beyteynu as likely climbers-aboard, could create a government with a sense of purpose—certainly more purpose than would be mustered by the improbable specter, bandied about after the elections, of a Left-Right "stop Kadima" alliance. Such a Center-Left coalition would presumably involve a programmatic swap in which Kadima, whose outlook on economic issues is for the most part closer to Netanyahu's, would cede to

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Labor its main social-welfare demands, in return for which Labor, which has been lukewarm on further unilateral disengagement, would back Kadima on extending it to the West Bank.

Economically, this need not be a bad thing. Although Israel needs still more, not less, free-market reform, the safety net for the weakest parts of its population, which bore the brunt of Netanyahu's budget cuts, requires strengthening. If this can be done without tax hikes or increases in overall government expenditures, the country's economy, now expanding again after years of stagnation, can continue to grow.

But the implementation of West Bank disengagement at this point is something else. Bitterly divisive though it was, Israel's withdrawal from Gaza last summer, with its uprooting of 8,000 settlers, caused less disruption than was feared because popular support for it far outweighed popular opposition. If the elections have made anything clear, it is that a similar measure of support does not exist at the moment for another withdrawal from most of Judea and Samaria, in which ten times as many settlers would have to be relocated. For Olmert to press ahead with this would be to make the same mistake that Yitzhak Rabin made in 1995. A narrow majority in the Knesset could be mustered with the help of the Arab parties, but the country would be torn apart once again. This is the last thing that anyone who cares about Israel's future should want to see happen.

Had Kadima won the 40 or more Knesset seats it seemed likely to win, a strong argument for undertaking West Bank disengagement under the next Israeli government could indeed have been made. After all, there have been elections next door to Israel, too, and Hamas's winning of them has made the case for Israeli unilateralism more cogent than ever.

Nor were the two elections unconnected, since the commanding lead enjoyed by Kadima in the early polls helped convince many Palestinians to vote for Hamas last January. The logic behind this was simple. Although a unilateral withdrawal from most of the West Bank may seem politically moderate to most Israelis, especially when compared with the hard-line posture of the Right, it was completely unacceptable to even the most "moderate" Palestinians, from whose perspective the only hope for peace negotiations with Israel lay in a victory for Labor and the Left. Once it was apparent that such a victory was not in the offing, Palestinians could not think of many reasons to prefer a corrupt and discredited Fatah to what they perceived to be a virtuous Hamas.

Yet this is not to say, as has been proposed by the never-say-die school of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, that Hamas's strong showing was simply a "throw the rascals out" vote that must not be allowed to curtail efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. It demeans the Palestinians' intelligence to attribute to them the notion that they were choosing between Middle Eastern versions of the Clean Government party and Tammany Hall. In speaking of a society in which every village and family has Hamas activists who for years have openly preached the destruction of Israel and the impossibility of co-existence with it, not to mention assisting and participating in the mass murder of Israeli civilians, only the disingenuous can contend that Palestinian voters did not know whom or what they were voting for.

It was important that the Palestinians were allowed to speak their minds—and fortunate for Israel that they spoke them now and not in another five or ten years. Imagine for a moment the scenario preferred by the die-hards of negotiation: that the Left in Israel had been much stronger; that Fatah had therefore won the January elections; that Mahmoud Abbas had then taken an unprecedentedly conciliatory stance toward Israel while somehow managing to keep his own and other Palestinian organizations in line; that Labor and the Left had consequently won in March; that serious negotiations had then commenced and resulted in a peace treaty based on a generous Israeli upgrading of Ehud Barak's last offer at Taba in early 2001—that is, an almost total return to the pre-1967 borders; that Israel had then withdrawn to these lines, uprooting between 100,000 and 200,000 Jewish settlers; and that, several years later . . . Hamas had won the next Palestinian Authority elections. For Israel, far better a Hamas in power today but not on the 1967 borders than a Hamas in power and on them tomorrow.

The much-debated question of whether, now that it is in charge of running the Palestinian Authority, Hamas will change its position and recognize Israel is, or at least should be, perfectly immaterial from the Israeli point of view. Verbal positions can always be changed—for this there are diplomats. There are a dozen different ways in which Hamas can "recognize" Israel conditionally, or provisionally, or hypothetically, without this "recognition" having the slightest validity in its own eyes. If it is under heavy enough American

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and European pressure to make tactical concessions, it may make them; *hudnas*, Islamic truces with the enemy, are never to be ruled out. But to suppose that Hamas will jettison its ideology or strategic goals with its first taste of power is quite simply to ignore the realities of radical Islamic politics.

Hamas is not, after all, just another Palestinian political organization that happens to have a religious leadership. It was founded as, and still is, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood—which is to say, it is part of an international jihadist movement that can no more accept the permanent presence of a Jewish state in the Muslim Middle East than it can accept pork or alcohol. A Hamas that changed its mind about this would have to change its mind about everything, starting with its basic understanding of Islam.

Moreover, just as there can be no lasting or meaningful peace between Israel and Hamas, so there can also be no lasting peace between Israel and a Palestinian people that is capable of choosing Hamas to govern it. And since the Palestinian people has shown that it is capable of such a choice, Israel must recalibrate its own thinking accordingly.

This leaves it with only two options: unilateral disengagement to borders determined by itself, or continued occupation for an indefinite period, definable for all practical purposes as forever, of all the territories occupied since 1967. I will not repeat the reasons, stated by me in previous COMMENTARY essays, that would make the second option calamitous. All that is new is that the Hamas victory has made unilateral disengagement far more practicable in international terms. About this, something needs to be said.

There has been all along a basic confusion on the part of much of the world between two things that are not at all identical: the Palestinians' real and wholly justified need to be free of Israeli military occupation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the Palestinians' need for an independent West Bank-Gaza state, which has little if any justification at all. These two notions have been conflated ever since King Hussein relinquished Jordan's claims on the West Bank in 1988, but they are in fact distinct and not intrinsically connected.

This is a crucial point, because the main objection to unilateral disengagement that has been raised in international circles is that it will make a viable Palestinian state impossible. The argument goes like this: since the West Bank borders to which Israel proposes to withdraw will leave the Palestinians with insufficient and inadequately contiguous territory, and since Israel's retention of much or all of East Jerusalem will deprive any Palestinian state of its natural and only possible capital, unilateral disengagement cannot take the place of a formal Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

THIS ARGUMENT is undoubtedly correct—if an independent West Bank-Gaza state is in fact an international desideratum. But even if that is theoretically the case, is a West Bank-Gaza state that is governed by Hamas, or that could be governed by Hamas, also a desideratum? Do the United States and Europe have any conceivable interest in the establishment of an independent Palestine ruled by a jihadist government? If they do not, and clearly they do not, might not the argument against Israeli unilateralism—namely, that it rules out the possibility of an independent Palestine—be seen instead as an argument *for* it?

But, it will be asked, if Israel withdraws from most of the West Bank, and an internationally recognized Palestinian state does not arise on the territory that is evacuated, what will take its place? How will the Palestinians there run their lives?

The answer is: with great difficulty—which is why they will be dependent on Jordan and Egypt, the two Arab countries adjacent to them, for economic and political help, and in the longer run for some form of economic and political union. And this, it must be said, would be a good thing, because both Jordan and Egypt have pro-Western governments that fear jihadism and understand its dangers, and both can be counted on to keep Hamas in check.

But—it will be next rejoined—neither Jordan nor Egypt wants this burden. Furthermore, both stand to be endangered by it, since discontented West Bank and Gaza populations with strong Islamic leanings will only worsen their own problems with the Muslim Brotherhood and threaten to destabilize their regimes. Why should Europe and the United States want to impose this on them?

Yet one must consider not just the tiny patch on the map called Israel/Palestine, nor even just Egypt and Jordan. One must think of the entire Muslim world, which is breeding an aggressively militant Islam that is a threat both to the West and to the countries it breeds in. Hamas is an integral part of this militancy, no less than is the government of Iran or al Qaeda, and the battle against it is part of a war that must be fought globally. The governments of Egypt and Jordan, whether they like it or not, are caught up in this war and are as interested as any government, and more perhaps than most,

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in seeing it won. Surely it is not too much to ask of them to act in their own self-interest, to say nothing of the interest of the Palestinian people, by helping to contain Hamas as best they can. If this means that, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, they will have to be responsible for law, order, and a measure of economic welfare in Gaza and the West Bank, that is not an unreasonable expectation.

But—comes the next objection—would this not in effect be asking the world to endorse a return to the situation that prevailed between 1948 and 1967, when Gaza was an Egyptian protectorate and the West Bank was part of Jordan?

Yes, it would (although it is also possible to conceive of Gaza as being associated not with Egypt but with Jordan, thus giving the latter country a port on the Mediterranean). And yet ironically, many of those expressing shock at such an idea are also likely to assert that the decades between 1948 and 1967 were far better for the Middle East than what followed, and that the region's worst problems began when Israel conquered the Egyptian Gaza Strip and the Jordanian West Bank. Well, then, just as, in a sense, the 1967 war returned Israel and the Palestinians to the pre-1948 days of the British Mandate, in which the two peoples lived together in a single land they were vying for with no clear demarcations between them, so unilateral disengagement would return Israel and the Palestinians roughly to the pre-1967 days of the 1949 armistice lines.

These lines, it must be remembered, originally marked the positions of the Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian armies at the end of the 1948-49 hostilities and were not necessarily intended to be permanent; never recognized as such by any of the Arab states, they were for a long time not recognized by Europe and the United States, either. It is a forgotten chapter of diplomatic history that in 1955, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, with the backing of U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, formally proposed that Israel agree to a "compromise" between the boundaries of the 1947 UN partition resolution and the 1949 lines, suggesting that this include ceding parts of the Negev to Jordan and Egypt to create a land-bridge between them. The suggestion disappeared from the table only as a result of the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli campaign against the Egyptians.

One might keep this episode in mind in weighing the argument that unilateral disengagement will not work because the borders Israel withdraws to will have no international standing. There is international standing and there is international standing. If one is talking only about the kind that involves de-facto toleration rather than de-jure acceptance, Israel could live with it for an extended period just as it lived with the 1949 armistice lines.

Naturally, de-facto toleration, too, has to be communicated in more ways than chilly silence. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice may have made the first move in this direction when, to a question about unilateral disengagement put to her three days after the Israeli elections, she responded: "I wouldn't on the face of it just say absolutely that we don't think there's any value in what the Israelis are talking about."

By the same token, one should also not just say, absolutely, that Hamas's victory has not set some in Washington and in European capitals to wondering whether anyone, the Palestinians included, really needs a West Bank-Gaza Palestinian state after all. It is true that the indispensability of such a state has become such a mantra of international discourse over the last fifteen or twenty years that to deny it (unlike denying the indispensability of a Kurdish, Tibetan, or Chechnyan state, which is considered a common-sense proposition) strikes many as akin to denying a law of nature. But nothing calls for critical rethinking more than the obvious; and if Hamas—whose Muslim Brotherhood ideology postulates the eventual disappearance of all Arab states anyway in a renewed pan-Islamic caliphate—has made the obvious less so by winning the Palestinian elections, it has done the world an unintended good turn.

Where then does this leave us? It would appear to have been preferable had Israelis given their newly elected government the go-ahead to proceed with unilateral disengagement in its current term of office, which has up to four years to run. Israel has lived for too long—nearly four decades!—without clear borders and with an ambiguous and tragic relationship to the occupied territories and their Arab and Jewish inhabitants. It is time to decide what to keep and what to leave, and if this cannot be done together with the Palestinians, it will have to be done without them.

Even without a clear mandate to disengage in the West Bank, the newly elected government, however it is constituted, has its work cut out for it. Apart from economic issues, it needs to concentrate on the kind of electoral reform that will give Israelis a political system they feel connected to. Such reform had originally been intended by Ariel Sharon to be one of Kadima's banners; although it

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fell by the wayside during the campaign, the election results have demonstrated how badly it needs to be raised again. While the complete abolition of proportional representation might be neither practicable nor desirable in Israel, and impossible in any case to pass in a Knesset many of whose parties would be abolishing themselves, a hybrid of proportional and district voting, such as exists elsewhere in the world, is feasible and probably the best solution.

Regarding the prospect of West Bank disengagement, too, there is much for the new government to do. Finishing the security barrier, currently planned for next year, is one such thing. Construction of the barrier has been painfully slow, in large measure because, despite official denials, it is intended to serve as the border to which a unilateral withdrawal will take place and thus to mark Israel's permanent frontier. This has meant carefully weighing demographic, military, political, and historical considerations against one another, and it may be that some decisions now need to be revised in the wake of the Palestinian elections. If the outcome of those elections does—as it should—make the undesirability of an independent Gaza-West Bank state utterly clear, Israel might consider annexing more West Bank territory in which the Palestinian population is small, such as parts of the Jordan Valley or the wilderness of Judea.

Above all, Ehud Olmert and Kadima can use the coming years to rally the international backing that alone can make disengagement workable. First and foremost, this means getting the support of the United States. Even if the Bush administration will no longer be in power by the time disengagement is carried out, any shifts or declarations of policy that it makes while still in office could well continue to be honored by future American governments. It is in Israel and America's joint interest, as it is in that of Arab countries like Egypt and Jordan, to give Hamas as small a power base as possible.

Disengagement will have to wait—but not necessarily for four years. Once the required pieces are in place, Olmert could call for a midterm election, asking Israelis for the mandate they did not give him in March. Indeed, since the pieces are *not* yet in place, it is perhaps just as well that the mandate was not given now. Too much hangs in the balance for haste. Four decades are indeed a long time, but they have all but passed already, and two or three more years will not make a crucial difference—if they are used wisely.

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Lee Harvey Oswald & the Liberal Crack-Up

James Piereson

LIBERALISM ENTERED the 1960's as *the* vital force in American politics, riding a wave of accomplishment running from the Progressive era through the New Deal and beyond. A handsome young president, John F. Kennedy, had just been elected on the promise to extend the unfinished agenda of reform. Liberalism owned the future, as Orwell might have said. Yet by the end of the decade, liberal doctrine was in disarray, with some of its central assumptions broken by the experience of the immediately preceding years. It has yet to recover.

What happened? There is, of course, a litany of standard answers, from the political to the cultural to the psychological, each seeking to explain the great upheaval summed up in that all-purpose phrase, "the 60's." To some, the relevant factor was a long overdue reaction to the repressions and pieties of 1950's conformism. To others, the watershed event was the escalating war in Vietnam, sparking an opposition movement that itself escalated into widespread disaffection from received political ideas and indeed from larger American purposes. Still others have pointed to the simmering racial tensions that would burst into the open in riots and looting, calling into question underlying assumptions about the course of integration if not the very possibility of social harmony.

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No doubt, the combination of these and other events had much to do with driving the nation's political culture to the Left in the latter half of the decade. But there can be no doubt, either, that an event from the early 1960's—namely, the assassination of Kennedy himself—contributed heavily. As many observers have noted, Kennedy's death seemed somehow to give new energy to the more extreme impulses of the Left, as not only left-wing ideas but revolutionary leftist leaders—Marx, Lenin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, and Castro among them—came in the aftermath to enjoy a greater vogue in the United States than at any other time in our history. By 1968, student radicals were taking over campuses and joining protest demonstrations in support of a host of extreme causes.

It is one of the ironies of the era that many young people who in 1963 reacted with profound grief to Kennedy's death would, just a few years later, come to champion a version of the left-wing doctrines that had motivated his assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. But why should this have been so? What was it about mid-century liberalism that allowed it to be knocked so badly off balance by a single blow?

TO RECALL John F. Kennedy's brief tenure as President is to be reminded of the distance that American liberalism has traveled since those days. His landmark domestic initiatives, passed with modest adjustments after his death, were a

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civil-rights bill and a major tax reduction to stimulate the economy. The civil-rights legislation is well known, but many have forgotten Kennedy's across-the-board, 30-percent tax cut, with the highest rate falling from 91 percent to 65 percent—a measure that, two decades later, would inspire Ronald Reagan's own tax-cutting agenda.

Kennedy was, moreover, a sophisticated anti-Communist who understood the stakes at issue in the cold war. His inspiring inaugural address in 1961 was entirely about foreign policy and the challenge of Communism to freedom-loving peoples. As President, his most notable victory was achieved by confronting the Soviet Union over its missiles in Cuba and by forcing their removal. And he was nothing if not forthright in declaring America's universal aims. "Let every nation know," he famously announced in his inaugural address, "whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty." America, he said in a speech to the Massachusetts legislature a week before he took office, was "a city upon a hill," an example and a model for the entire world.

Though now remembered for his liberal idealism, Kennedy was, in short, a representative instead of the era's *pragmatic* liberalism: an advocate of practical reform at home and American strength abroad. With his bold rhetoric and confidence in problem-solving, he was in many ways the personification of an earlier era's liberal hopes. Both in substance and in approach, he seemed to express the central principle of the reform tradition—namely, that progress was to be achieved not by the quixotic pursuit of ideals but by the application of rationality and knowledge to the problems of public life. Kennedy himself often spoke in these terms, pointing to ignorance and extremism as the twin enemies to be overcome.

None of this was an accident of the moment; it had been building for a long time. During the 1950's, thoughtful liberals had come to understand that they were no longer outsiders in American life; to the contrary, they had become the political establishment. Already in power for two extraordinarily eventful decades, they could take credit for the domestic experiments of the New Deal, the victory over fascism, and the creation of the postwar international order. By virtue of these achievements, liberalism had emerged as the nation's public philosophy.

Though a doctrine of reform and progress, liberalism had thus begun to absorb some of the intellectual characteristics of conservatism: a due regard for tradition and continuity, a sense that progress must be built on the solid achievements of the past. More strikingly, liberals had come to see their most vocal domestic opponents as radicals—individuals and movements bent on undoing the established order. This challenge to the liberal establishment came not from the radical Left, however, but from the Right, in the form of anti-Communism, Christian fundamentalism, and racial and religious bigotry.

Adlai Stevenson, a favorite of liberals of the era, described during his 1952 presidential campaign the paradoxical situation that liberals now occupied:

> The strange alchemy of time has somehow converted the Democrats into the truly conservative party in the country—the party dedicated to conserving all that is best and building solidly and safely on these foundations. The Republicans, by contrast, are behaving like the radical party—the party of the reckless and embittered, bent on dismantling institutions which have been built solidly into our social fabric.

THE LIBERAL movement was fortunate to have had during this time a group of formidable intellectual spokesmen, figures like Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Bell, Lionel Trilling, and David Riesman. Their persistent focus was on the dangers to the nation, as they saw them, arising from the American Right. In contrast to their Progressive and New Deal predecessors, who had thought mainly in terms of change, reform, and new policy, these writers thought more in terms of consolidating earlier gains, defending them against fresh challenges, and reconciling them with the broad tradition of American democracy.

In their view, the complaints of the Right derived not from groups in possession of competing status and authority but from those who felt weak and dispossessed by modern life. Bell referred to this collection of forces as the "radical Right," a term he employed in the title of an influential book of essays that he edited on the subject in 1962. Hofstadter preferred the term "pseudo-conservative," which he borrowed from Theodor Adorno, the German sociologist, to describe those "who employ the rhetoric of conservatism, [but] show signs of a serious and restless dissatisfaction with American life, traditions, and institutions. They have little in common with the temperate and compromising spirit of true conservatism in the classical sense of the word."

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These scholars saw the McCarthyites and religious fundamentalists of the 1950's as only the most up-to-date expression of an enduring extremist impulse that had earlier produced the "Know-Nothings" in the 1850's, the populists in the 1890's, and the followers of Father Charles Coughlin or Huey Long in the 1930's. Such movements, while arising out of different conditions, had certain features in common—in particular, the conviction that their people had been "sold out" by a conspiracy of Wall Street financiers, traitors in the government, or some other sinister group. As Bell put it in an essay in *The Radical Right*, "The theme of conspiracy haunts the mind of the radical rightist."

This same thought was developed most memorably in Hofstadter's 1964 book, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Hofstadter was impressed not simply by the wilder statements emanating from the radical Right—for example, the claim by Joseph Welch of the John Birch Society that President Eisenhower was a Communist—but by a mode of argumentation that seemed to begin with feelings of persecution and conclude with a recital of grandiose plots against the nation and its way of life. Communist infiltration was, of course, a favored theme, but Hofstadter also cited paranoid fears about fluoride in the drinking water, efforts to control the sale of guns, federal aid to education, and other (usually) liberal initiatives of government. Important events, from this perspective, never happened through coincidence, circumstance, or the unfolding of complex processes; they were invariably the work of some unseen but all-powerful malevolent force.

IN THE months leading up to Kennedy's assassination, violent acts committed by representatives of the radical Right did indeed seem to be escalating. In June 1963, the civil-rights leader Medgar Evers was shot and killed outside his home in Jackson, Mississippi. In September, a bomb was detonated at a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four young girls. The Ku Klux Klan was linked to both crimes. In October, Adlai Stevenson, then the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, ventured to Dallas for a speech to commemorate "UN Day" and was met by demonstrators proclaiming "United States Day." Heckled during his remarks, Stevenson was jostled and spat upon by protesters as he tried to depart and finally was struck over the head with a cardboard placard as he made his way to his car.

Seeming to fit into a pattern of right-wing violence, these events were easily absorbed into the explanatory structure of liberal thought. The melee in Dallas, meanwhile, gave Kennedy aides pause about the President's planned trip to that city. Dallas, they feared, was a hotbed of the far Right and a dangerous place to visit.

Hence, when the word spread on November 22 that President Kennedy had been shot, the immediate and understandable reaction was that the assassin must be a right-wing extremist—an anti-Communist, perhaps, or a white supremacist. Such speculation went out immediately over the national airwaves, and it seemed to make perfect sense, echoed by the likes of John Kenneth Galbraith and Chief Justice Earl Warren, who said that Kennedy had been martyred "as a result of the hatred and bitterness that has been injected into the life of our nation by bigots."

It therefore came as a shock when the police announced later the same day that a Communist had been arrested for the murder, and when the television networks began to run tapes taken a few months earlier showing the suspected assassin passing out leaflets in New Orleans in support of Fidel Castro. Nor was Lee Harvey Oswald just any leftist, playing games with radical ideas in order to shock friends and relatives. Instead, he was a dyed-in-the-wool Communist who had defected to the Soviet Union and married a Russian woman before returning to the U.S. the previous year. One of the first of an evolving breed, Oswald had lately rejected the Soviet Union in favor of third-world dictators like Mao, Ho, and Castro.

Informed later that evening of Oswald's arrest, Mrs. Kennedy lamented bitterly that her husband had apparently been shot by this warped and misguided Communist. To have been killed by such a person, she felt, would rob his death of all meaning. Far better, she said, if, like Lincoln, he had been martyred for civil rights and racial justice.

Given her husband's politics, Mrs. Kennedy's comment might seem curious. For one thing, he had staked his presidency on mounting an aggressive challenge to Communism; for another, during his brief term in office the cold war had reached its most dangerous point in his confrontation with the Soviet Union over Cuba. From this perspective, it should not have been so jarring to learn that he was a casualty of the cold war. More significantly, however, the remark suggests that Mrs. Kennedy was already thinking about how President Kennedy's legacy should be framed, and was sensing that the identity of the assassin might prove inconvenient in this regard.

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OSWALD WAS arrested, and later charged with the assassination, on the basis of solid evidence—all of it laid out in the Warren Commission report made public ten months later and, since then, in numerous television documentaries and in books like Gerald Posner's *Case Closed* (1993).

Yet the Warren report was vigorously attacked soon after it appeared, and has been the subject of controversy ever since. There is little point in rehearsing the many criticisms of the commission's work, nearly all of which question the conclusion that a single gunman was responsible for the assassination. These criticisms have been exhaustively answered in Posner's book and in two comprehensive articles in COMMENTARY by Jacob Cohen.* Even Norman Mailer, in his own exhaustive study (*Oswald's Tale*, 1995), concluded that Oswald was the probable assassin. Moreover, as Posner and Cohen point out, whatever difficulties attend the Warren report, they pale in comparison to those confronting the various conspiracy theories that have been offered as alternatives to the much-maligned "single bullet" theory of the Warren Commission.

What, then, explains the resilience of such fanciful and conspiratorial thinking? Part of the answer surely lies in the enduring need of the Left to circumvent the most inconvenient fact about President Kennedy's assassination—that he was killed by a Communist and probably for reasons related to left-wing ideology. If the case against Oswald can be clouded or denied, it opens up the possibility that Kennedy was killed by a more familiar villain, one of the many malignant forces on the Right.

Thus, in *JFK* (1991), the filmmaker Oliver Stone, like his hero the New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, suggests that the assassination was engineered by governmental figures connected to the FBI or CIA. Some have insinuated that Lyndon Johnson was involved in the plot. Others have argued that Kennedy was the victim of a "hit" by organized crime in retaliation for his administration's zealous prosecution of mob figures. All of these theorists have much in common with the archetypes of Hofstadter's "paranoid style": they begin their investigations with presumptions of conspiracy, and then arrange their facts to justify a pre-determined conclusion.

True, they are also responding to a key weakness in the Warren report, which, though taking full note of Oswald's Communist sympathies and activities, played them down as motivations for killing President Kennedy. Oswald, the commission said, was driven by several factors, including a psychological "hostility to his environment," failure to establish meaningful relationships with others, difficulties with his wife, perpetual discontent with the world around him, hatred of American society, a search for recognition and a wish to play a role in history, and, finally, his commitment to Marxism and Communism. This farrago of causes implies that Oswald was more a confused loner than a motivated ideologue. In the years and decades following the assassination, the American people would increasingly view the assassin in such terms.

Yet the record suggests that the decisive and overriding factor behind Oswald's various actions was ideology. The assassination of President Kennedy was hardly an isolated incident in his political odyssey from the Marine Corps to the Soviet Union and back to the United States. In the months leading up to the assassination, Oswald had tried to kill the ultra-conservative retired Army General Edwin A. Walker (his shot missed) with the same rifle that he later used to shoot President Kennedy; initiated an altercation with anti-Castro figures in New Orleans that led to his arrest; and visited the Cuban embassy in Mexico City where, while seeking permission to travel to Cuba, he issued a threat against the life of the President. Edward Jay Epstein (in *Legend*, 1978) and Jean Davison (in *Oswald's Game*, 1983) suggest that Oswald shot President Kennedy in retaliation for the administration's schemes to eliminate Castro.

There is much about Oswald and the assassination that can now never be known for certain. Of one thing, however, there can be little doubt: there would never have been any serious talk about a conspiracy if President Kennedy had been shot by a right-wing figure whose guilt was established by the same evidence as condemned Oswald. Such an event would have been readily understood in terms of then prevailing assumptions about the dangers from the Right. Kennedy's assassin, however, bolted onto the historical stage in violation of a script that many people had assimilated as the truth about America. Instead of adjusting their thinking accordingly, they strove to account for the discordance by taking refuge in conspiracy theories.

THERE WAS also another avenue of escape from the contradiction posed by the assassination. If one had to accept the fact that Oswald committed the deadly act, it was still possible to identify some broader cause that did not necessarily involve

* "Conspiracy Fever," October 1975; "Yes, Oswald Alone Killed Kennedy," June 1992.

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a conspiracy. Once again, Mrs. Kennedy instinctively hinted at such a cause in the grief-filled hours following the assassination. Jim Bishop (in *The Day Kennedy Was Shot*, 1972) reports that aboard Air Force One en route back to Washington, various people, including Lady Bird Johnson, had urged her to change out of the blood-spattered clothes she was still wearing. "No," she replied more than once, "I want them to see what they have done."

Who were "they"? The *New York Times* columnist James Reston supplied an answer of sorts in an article that appeared the next day under the title, "Why America Weeps: Kennedy Victim of Violent Streak He Sought to Curb in Nation." Reston wrote:

> America wept tonight, not alone for its dead young President, but for itself. The grief was general, for somehow the worst in the nation had prevailed over the best. The indictment extended beyond the assassin, for something in the nation itself, some strain of madness and violence, had destroyed the highest symbol of law and order.

The nation itself, Reston implied, was ultimately responsible for Oswald's murderous act.

Returning to this theme two days later in an article suggestively titled "A Portion of Guilt for All," Reston asserted that there was "a rebellion in the land against law and good faith, and . . . private anger and sorrow are not enough to redeem the events of the last few days." He went on to cite a sermon delivered on November 24 by a Washington clergyman who, linking President Kennedy with Jesus, told his congregation that "We have been present at a new crucifixion. All of us had a part in the slaying of the President."

This idea, too—that the nation as a whole was finally to blame for the assassination—came to be repeated widely and incorporated into the public's understanding of the event. Liberals in particular tended to see Kennedy's death in this light, that is, as an outgrowth of a violent or extremist streak in the nation's culture. Yet doing so required its own species of doublethink, for the fact is that Oswald was not in any way a representative figure. He played no role in any domestic extremist movement. His radicalism was wholly un-American and anti-American. Even as a Communist or radical, he was *sui generis*. There was nothing about Oswald that even remotely reflected any broader pattern in American life.

Something strangely similar to this act of mental contortion would occur five years later in response to the assassination in Los Angeles of Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Once again, many pointed to a national culture of violence and extremism as the ultimate cause of the killing. Jacqueline Kennedy herself, according to several biographers, was sufficiently shocked by this second assassination in her family that she resolved to live abroad with her children. Yet Senator Kennedy was killed by a Palestinian Arab, Sirhan Sirhan, who had resolved to act when he heard Kennedy express support for Israel while campaigning for the presidency in California. Sirhan represented more the hatreds of the world from which he had emigrated than any impulse in American culture.

STILL ANOTHER curiosity in the wake of the assassination was the transformation of the image of Kennedy himself. Though very much a characteristic liberal of his day, as we have seen, he came to be portrayed as a liberal hero of a very different sort—a leader who might have led the nation into a new age of peace, love, and understanding. Such a portrayal was encouraged by tributes and memorials inspired by friends and members of the Kennedy family as well as by the numerous books published after the assassination, particularly those by the presidential aides Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (*A Thousand Days*, 1965) and Theodore Sorenson (*Kennedy*, 1965).

The most potent element of this image-making was, of course, the now inescapable association of Kennedy with the legend of King Arthur and Camelot. This was the invention of Jacqueline Kennedy, who a week after her husband's death pressed the idea upon the journalist Theodore H. White in the course of an interview that would serve as the basis for an article by him in *Life* magazine. White later regretted the role he had played in transmitting this romantic image to the public. "Quite inadvertently," he wrote in his memoir, *In Search of History* (1978), "I was her instrument in labeling the myth."

White's short essay in *Life* contained a number of Mrs. Kennedy's wistful remembrances, one of which was the President's fondness for the title tune from the Lerner & Lowe Broadway hit, *Camelot*. His favorite lines, she told White, were these: "Don't let it be forgot,/that once there was a spot,/for one brief shining moment/that was Camelot." "There will be great Presidents again," she continued, "but there will never be another Camelot again." According to Mrs. Kennedy, her husband was an idealist who saw history as the

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work of heroes, and she wished to have his memory preserved in the form of appropriate symbols rather than in the dry and dusty books written by historians. Camelot was one such symbol; the eternal flame that she had placed on his grave was another.

Significantly, Mrs. Kennedy's notion of Arthurian heroism derived not from Sir Thomas Mallory's 15th-century classic *Le Morte d'Arthur* but from *The Once and Future King* (1958) by T.H. White (no relation to the journalist), on which the musical was based. White's telling of the saga pokes fun at the pretensions of knighthood, pointedly criticizes militarism and nationalism, and portrays Arthur as a new kind of hero: an idealistic peacemaker seeking to tame the bellicose passions of his age. This may be one reason why Mrs. Kennedy's effort to frame her husband's legacy in this way was widely regarded as a distorted caricature of the real Kennedy and something he himself would have laughed at. Aides and associates reported that they had never heard Kennedy speak either about *Camelot* the musical or about its theme song. Some of Mrs. Kennedy's friends said they had never even heard *her* speak about King Arthur or the play prior to the assassination.

According to Schlesinger, Mrs. Kennedy later thought she may have overdone this theme. Be that as it may, one has to give her credit for quick thinking in the midst of tragedy and grief—and also for injecting a set of ideas into the cultural atmosphere that would have large consequences. For not only did the *Camelot* reading of heroic public service cut liberalism off from its once-vigorous nationalist impulses but, if one accepted the image of a utopian Kennedy Camelot—and many did—then the best times were now in the past and would not soon be recovered. Life would go on, but America's future could never match the magical chapter that had been brought to a premature end. Such thinking drew into question the no less canonical liberal assumption of steady historical progress, and compromised the liberal faith in the future.

Without intending to do so, Mrs. Kennedy had put forth an interpretation of her husband's life and death that undercut mid-century liberalism at its core.

THE SUCCESS of the Kennedy myth bore still other troubling fruit for American liberalism. Kennedy had added something novel to the mix of our public life, skillfully managing to transcend his role as a politician to become a cultural figure in his own right—indeed, a celebrity. In this he was most unlike other prominent political figures of the time.

Kennedy was young and articulate; he wore his hair long; he sailed and played touch football; he consorted with Hollywood stars and Harvard professors; he was even something of an intellectual, speaking in measured cadences and having won (with the assistance of his father) a Pulitzer Prize for *Profiles in Courage* (1955). Above all, he was rich. His wife, moreover, was beautiful and glamorous; she wore French fashions and even spoke French (and Spanish, too). The two Kennedy children were every bit as photogenic as their parents. The American people had never seen anything like the Kennedys, except in the movies.

Kennedy was thus our first President and—with the partial exception of Bill Clinton—the only one so far successfully to marry the role of politician to that of cultural celebrity. Such a thing would never have occurred to Harry Truman or Franklin Roosevelt. As for Ronald Reagan, who moved in the opposite direction, out of the world of celebrity into politics, he never exercised the influence over that world that Kennedy did. Indeed, Kennedy's earlier success in linking liberalism with celebrity was greatly responsible for turning Hollywood into the liberal-Left fortification that it is today.

Kennedy achieved this through a style that gave the appearance of a man at the cutting edge of new cultural trends, in contrast to other politicians (like Nixon or Eisenhower) who generally represented the established patterns and morals of middle-class life. In his memoir, Sorenson acknowledges that at the inauguration, Kennedy deliberately played up this purely stylistic contrast between himself and Eisenhower, his tired and aging predecessor. Schlesinger, for his part, sees in Kennedy's style a substantive statement in itself: "His coolness was itself a new frontier. It meant freedom from the stereotyped responses of the past. . . . It offered hope for spontaneity in a country drowning in its own passivity." Norman Mailer, the original "hipster," saw Kennedy as an "existential hero," a man who would courageously court death in quest of authentic experience.

But here is another curious twist. While Kennedy understood courage to involve facing down Communism or putting a man on the moon, Mailer was thinking in terms of what he called "a revolution in the consciousness of our time," a goal (whether laudable or not) far beyond the capacity of any political leader to deliver. It is true that Kennedy cultivated a style—a style whose charms were magnified a thousandfold by the newly potent

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medium of television. But it is also obvious that many read far more into this style than was really there. Intellectuals, journalists, and significant cohorts of the college-educated young erroneously equated Kennedy's style with a bohemian rejection of the blandness and conformity of middle-class life, when it in fact reflected the ways of the American aristocracy to which he and his wife belonged. (So, in a somewhat different way, did his relentless pursuit of sex and use of drugs.)

In projecting their own hopes on to Kennedy, liberals like Schlesinger and cultural radicals like Mailer were redefining liberalism more in terms of a posture than in terms of a coherent body of ideas about government and politics. This, too, would have consequences. Because Kennedy embodied sophistication, he was seen after his death as more "authentic" than such otherwise authentically liberal figures as Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey, who labored for legislative victories but were otherwise hopelessly old-fashioned. In appearing to stand above and apart from the conventions of middle-class life, he was seen as having opened up possibilities for a different kind of politics, sparking impulses that would eventually be absorbed into the mainstream of liberal thought. Within a few years of Kennedy's death, liberals had come to be more preoccupied with cultural issues—feminism, sexual freedom, gay rights—than with the traditional concerns that had animated Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy himself.

Kennedy's had been a unique balancing act, combining ardent patriotism with hip sophistication in a mix that could appeal both to traditional Americans and to the new cultural activists. After his death, these two groups divided into conflicting camps, thereby establishing the terms for the long-running culture war that continues today. As much as anything else, the immersion in cultural politics in the years following the assassination may have helped bring about the end of the liberal era.

Kennedy's assassination heralded a break with the American past and a corresponding rupture in the evolving world of liberal ideas. Far from spurring the liberal tradition forward, as some today still suggest, it played a significant role in its disintegration. In the years and decades that followed, nearly all of the tendencies of the far Right that had so unnerved the liberals of the 1950's—the fascination with conspiracies, the use of overheated and abusive rhetoric to characterize political adversaries, expressions of hatred for the United States and its national culture—moved across the political spectrum to the far and then the near Left.

For many American liberals, the shock of Kennedy's death compromised their faith in the nation itself. Against all evidence, they concluded that a violent strain in our national culture was somehow to blame. A confident, practical, and forward-looking philosophy with a heritage of accomplishment was thus turned into a doctrine of pessimism and self-blame, with a decidedly dark view of American society. Such assumptions, far from marking a temporary adjustment to the events of the 1960's, have proved remarkably durable.

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The Escape Artist

Bette Howland

> During these last decades the interest in professional fasting has markedly diminished. . . . We live in a different world now.
>
> —Franz Kafka, "A Hunger Artist"

A PHOTOGRAPH OF Harry Houdini in middle age. Handsome Houdini: the dignified nose, the shapely lips. His forehead is bold, his hair thinning, white at the temples, wizard-winged over the ears. Sternly he frowns at you, arms crossed, sleeves pushed back. Houdini rolled up his sleeves when he got down to work, to show he was hiding nothing there; but he's not working now. He stands before bookshelves in frock coat and clerical collar, a watch on his vest, a pin in his lapel—emblem of one of his many fraternal organizations. He was a great civic booster, in the American way.

What kind of picture is this? Not Houdini the showman, the publicity-hound; it's too intimate for that. This could be a self-portrait: citizen Houdini, preacher, professor, judge. Except for the hands: tough skin, prehensile thumbs, the wrists linked by a charm-bracelet padlock on a single chain.

Houdini was a founding member of the Rabbis' Sons Theatrical Benevolent Association—singers, composers, comedians, movie moguls, from rabbinical families going back many generations. In America it took only one; the New World was not for the unworldly, and these rabbis' sons had little learning. Here the fathers became the children and the children the fathers, the breadwinners. This was what Reb Yidel Pankower, the Hebrew teacher in Henry Roth's classic *Call It Sleep*, lamented as the "sidewalk and gutter generation." In later generations, parents might speak Yiddish as a private language, bittersweet. In immigrant families, the children possessed the sweet secret tongue—the language of the streets, but the words were magic: open Sesame. Here everyone was an upstart, starting from scratch. Jews did not have to be a people apart.

For some rabbis' or cantors' sons—the Gershwins, the Berlins, the Jolsons, the Zukors and Selznicks, the brothers Warner and Shubert—this released an explosion of energy. Houdini came before most of them—his family spoke German, not Yiddish—and he exhibited the energy in a literal, physical form. He could do what magicians do: pluck coins from thin air and rabbits from hats, swallow packets of sewing needles and spin them out neatly threaded. At a clap of his hands elephants disappeared; he walked through brick walls. A magic trick is a magic trick; an *escape* is a success story. Houdini made the Escape uniquely his own.

Any version of the story will likely commit errors of fact; so much is fable. That's the way he wanted it. Houdini was his own biographer. Take the one about him as a messenger boy, coming home late one winter night. It's Christmas eve, he's

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covered with snow, the cupboard is bare. "Shake me," he tells his mother. "Shake me, I'm magic." He gives a shimmy, and coins—tips he's collected all the long day—come clattering down from his cap and jacket, and roll, glittering, over the floor. Is it true? Did it happen, this first and best of all magic tricks? Trust the tale: Houdini made it come true.

During his lifetime, few knew the name he was born with—Erik Weisz/Erich Weiss—let alone where or when. For the record, it was Budapest, 1874. He was four when he came to America—his first escape. His father, a Reform rabbi, led a small new congregation in, of all places, Appleton, Wisconsin. The name is an idyll. Years later, Houdini would dream of seeing his parents as he'd seen them then, sitting and drinking coffee under a tree.

But Rabbi Weiss was not reformed enough for the Jews of leafy little Appleton. The family moved to Milwaukee, where they fared no better; the eldest son, a half-brother, died of TB. At eight, Houdini was peddling papers and shining shoes; at twelve, he hopped a freight car and lit out for Texas, hoping to send money home. He dropped his mother a postcard to let her know. For the rabbi's son, not yet of bar-mitzvah age, this rite of passage was a private enterprise.

Things didn't pan out, and the following year found him with his father in New York; the rabbi, as usual, was looking for work. If only the father could have had some of the son's luck, but that's how it was. The new exodus, the great wave from Eastern Europe, was well under way; the lifted lamp, the Golden Door. Hebrew teachers were a dime a dozen, and fewer and fewer rabbis seemed needed for more and more Jews. They'd landed in the New World at last, and Appleton was only a dream.

Between the two of them they managed to scrape up funds to send for the rest. It was 1888, the year of the Great Blizzard, snowdrifts taller than telegraph poles; by now there were six children, and things went from bad to worse. Houdini would never talk much about those hard times, "too painful to recall," but this was when he began doing card tricks and sleight of hand, passing the hat for "throw" money.

Though his two older brothers must have contributed to the family larder, it was clear from the start which son was the one full of beans. He was eighteen when his father died—miserably, of tongue cancer—and soon afterward he left his job as a necktie-cutter and set out to make his name in magic, the name that would stand for the thing.

There is something you need to know about Houdini's escapes: no one actually saw him do them. At least, not at first. These were deeds done in the dark. A committee from the audience might be summoned onstage to search him from head to toe—his wiry hair, the soles of his feet; poking in his ears, prying under his tongue. Not for nothing had Houdini learned to swallow needles. They inspected the props—handcuffs, leg-irons, padlocks, chains—and when they'd made sure all was kosher, Houdini would retire to a cabinet, his "ghost house"; a curtain was drawn around it, and the audience would wait. And wait. They sweated it out in their seats. Time passed, watches ticked away, and the band played on.

Audiences are so polite. They assume that a trick doesn't begin until the preparations are through. But the preparation—the stage business—*is* the trick. By the time the boxes were locked, the cabinets closed, the curtains drawn, it was all over. Houdini could emerge at his leisure, shackles intact, his methods a mystery, leaving no clue.

Was this entertainment, or an ordeal? How to explain such emotion—cheers, standing ovations, tears of joy and relief, Houdini swept from the stage and borne through the streets? People aren't dumb. Some must have suspected that inside his cabinet, behind his curtain, Houdini was getting a little assistance: tricks, gimmicks, lock-picks, keys. Feats even more difficult, performed in plain sight, would not catch on until a later phase of his career—and of his relation with his public. But Houdini was already standing magic on its head: for speed, struggle; for ease, anxiety; for mastery, risk and the possibility of failure. In the intimacy of the vaudeville stage, his audiences became his accomplices. He was doing things the hard way, and they were on his side.

And he *had* done things the hard way. The 1890's were hard times—strikes, riots, deep economic depression; no time for a young green apprentice to break into show business. Teamed up with friends, then his brother, and at last his wife, Bess, Houdini took what he could get. Beer gardens, dime museums, traveling circuses, medicine shows, carnival midways; performing a dozen times a day—magic tricks, mind-reading acts, song and dance, Punch and Judy skits, comedy routines; sharing billing with fan dancers, sword swallowers, snake-oil salesmen, giants, midgets, tattooed men, bearded ladies. In a pinch he peddled miracle cures, tooted horns in parades, and carried on as the Wild Man in a Cage.

Shows folded, troupes disbanded, managers ab-

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sconded with funds, when funds there were. The Houdinis found themselves stranded in the small towns of America. They must both have looked like runaways, Houdini with peach-fuzz cheeks and elevator shoes, Bess shy-eyed and bow-lipped and too small to find costumes that fit. "What the hell d'ya think I'm running here," a manager bawled—"a kindergarten?" When things got bad, Houdini sold his magic tricks, a practice he would continue in his days of fame and fortune; and when they got worse, he vowed to call it quits.

But the truth is, he'd found a home with this wandering tribe. He liked to say he'd made his debut in the circus, at the age of nine, in a school chum's backyard in Milwaukee, swinging by his heels from a trapeze. Erie, he called himself, Prince of the Air. He was, he ever would be, the daring young man on the flying trapeze.

BESS TOLD of an incident soon after their marriage. He was twenty, she was sixteen—or eighteen. She was a schoolgirl sheltered by a strict Catholic mother—or herself half of a singing duo. They met at a birthday party where she was a chaperoned guest and Houdini the paid entertainment—or on Coney Island, where both were playing, introduced by his brother, stage name Hardeen. It depends on whom you ask. She'd known him for two weeks. Late one night, after the show, Houdini invites his bride and his brother out for a stroll; they halt in the middle of a bridge. Swift dark water, church bells tolling the hour, clouds obscuring the moon. The stage is set. At the last stroke of midnight he raises their two hands in his. They must swear to be true to him; never to betray him; to pledge their loyalty to him unto death and carry his secrets with them to the grave.

Suspense. Sensation. Sentiment. The three S's of melodrama, and the story of his life.

A break came with a substitution trick. One partner is tied in a sack and locked in a box; the other steps behind a screen. The next thing you know, lo and behold! the one in the box steps out from the screen and the other is discovered locked in the box. The Houdinis had it down to three seconds. The old switch got a fanciful new name, "Metamorphosis." This may have suggested the idea of combining locks and boxes.

Houdini would say he could recall the works of every lock he ever picked, and that was probably no boast; he understood the yin/yang of locks and keys. He found in them a calling: studying, tinkering, acquiring whatever devices he could get his hands on. His competitiveness made him a cutthroat collector, and his accumulation of books, artifacts, memorabilia—on magic, theater, crime, and the occult—threatened finally to turn the Houdinis out of house and home. And home, by then, was a four-story mansion.

Magicians had done handcuff releases before; no one had tried to make them the main event. Houdini tried, and did not at first succeed. He was doing too many, too fast; he made it look easy—like magic. Escape wasn't yet an act; Houdini wasn't yet Houdini.

Meanwhile he courted police stations wherever he played, offering to test their wares. It was good publicity, and free. Stripped, searched, handcuffed, padlocked, chained to iron bars—often in "a nude condition"—as the stage bills read, NOTHING CAN HOLD HOUDINI. In time, notices for the lock-picker/safe-cracker/jail-breaker would include publicity puffs from official guardians of law and order around the country and across the sea: the Tombs, Scotland Yard, the famous prison-fortresses of Europe, cells of notorious criminals and notable assassins. Once, after freeing himself, and having a little time on his hands, he raced through a jail—this was Murderer's Row—picking locks with the greatest of ease. So startled were the prisoners at this sudden apparition, a naked man turning them out of their cells, that they let him switch them around and lock them back up. It was "Metamorphosis" again.

THE CHALLENGE ACT

BRING YOUR OWN HANDCUFFS

The essence of showmanship is upping the ante. Houdini was offering a reward—fifty bucks, no small potatoes in those days—to anyone who could produce a lock that would stump him. This too wasn't exactly new, but when Houdini said challenge, he meant challenge: contest, conquest, was his life's blood. He was discovering himself, the Houdini in him—the dare, double-dare, and double-double-dare.

Publicity shots of the time show a compact, muscle-bound young man, in little more than a loincloth, strung like a Christmas tree with the hardware of his trade. Chains hang from his neck, wind around his arms, twist through his legs, anchored here and there by heavy-duty padlocks and iron weights, the more the merrier. Hands manacled in front of him, he crouches like a diver, ready to spring. (The shackles were mostly ornaments, and the crouching diving stance afforded enough slack to start his escape.)

For all the decorations, Houdini's trademark was

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his hair. Kinky Jewish hair, erupting from his head sidewise, off-center, in two uneven humps, almost horns. Cartoonists loved it: the sign of the sorcerer, his electric-charged energies. Not all of his escapes would be Challenge Acts, but from now on they would always be challenges.

At the turn of the century, the Houdinis embarked for England and the Old World, without bookings, without blessings. As an "escapologist" and a one-man show, he'd worked his way up from the bottom of the bill to a headliner on the vaudeville circuit, making as much as $400 a week. But this was not his idea of success—success beyond his wildest dreams. The wind was in his sails. He was twenty-six years old, and half his life was over.

It didn't take long before Houdini was packing them in, a blockbuster, sold-out houses, engagements extended wherever he played: England, the continent, the crowned heads and capitals of Europe. Managers fought over him. In Germany the *Polizei* stood by, watching a publicity stunt in a park, then arrested him for walking on the grass. How could he not succeed? These were places where they took their locks and boxes seriously. The tour would last five years.

Houdini impersonators popped up. Haudyni, Nordini, Mourdini—even a Miss Undina, with veils, and a modest Miss Lincoln in knickers, middy blouse, and sober black stockings, wary of adding cheesecake to chains. Leave it to Houdini to pluck his own rival out of his hat. He cabled his brother, the magician Hardeen: "Come over, the apples are ripe." Here was the Houdini imitator to end all Houdini imitators; not only was he equipped with Houdini's set-ups, and in on Houdini's secrets, he was Houdini's own flesh and blood. All his rivals were second-hand. His feats might be duplicated, might even be surpassed; they could never be equaled. Only Houdini could be a Houdini.

He was the New World's new man: the little guy, the challenger, an American jack-in-the-box wild and woolly as his hair. There was a strange symmetry here: an immigrant Jew exported to the Old World as the spirit of the new. Once again, he'd lit out for the territory.

It is worth noting that, until this tour, he had never run into anti-Semitism, not in America—though he would. He was unprepared for its pervasiveness in Europe, so casual, so virulent. And then there was Russia, in a class by itself. It was 1903, the year of the Kishinev pogrom, when, in the words of Hayyim Nahman Bialik's great poem, "the slaughter came with the spring." So this was the Old Country. Feted by royalty, showered with gifts, the rabbi's son left Russia with a sense of escape even he had never felt, and he never went back there again.

Houdini had left home a minor music-hall entertainer; he returned a figure of fame—a Name, with the New World still to conquer. Until the Great War, this would be the pattern. He preferred touring abroad, where bookings were longer and the accommodations better; but he had to set foot on native ground or, he said, his work would suffer. It sounds hifalutin, but it was fact. He needed the competition. He was setting up a rivalry between his two worlds—a rivalry, ever escalating, with himself. Who else was there?

Houdini's story was a melodrama in three acts, and the second was about to begin.

Packing crates, steamer trunks, bank vaults, beer barrels; steel boilers riveted shut; the carcass of a "sea monster" washed ashore (who thought that one up?); a gigantic football trotted up the aisle by husky linemen; a barred and metal-plated *carette*, a jail cell on wheels, transporting the luckless and the desperate to Siberia. A street rhyme summed it up: "The great handcuff king/Who wriggles to freedom/From any old thing." Where the emphasis before had been on suspense, now it was sensation. Each return engagement had to knock 'em dead, with contraptions more elaborate and farfetched. The apparatus for his celebrated Water Torture Cell required a freight car. The new note was in the new vocabulary:

HOUDINI'S DEATH-DEFYING MYSTERY

FAILURE MEANS A DROWNING DEATH

If upping the ante is the essence of showmanship, it's also the imperative. Houdini was tiring of locks and boxes. Now he was performing on stage in full view, without cabinets and curtains, without picks and gimmicks. These were real restraints, real punishments, real tortures—some of them devised for real people. With a magic trick you know you're being fooled, you just can't see how it's done. Now audiences saw how it was done—at length, and in excruciating detail.

The theater itself was too confining, just another box. He wanted more room, greater challenges, bigger crowds. Crowds especially. In publicity stunts, all the world was his stage prop. The Upside Down Straitjacket Escape: Houdini, arms strapped across his chest, dangling head first from the roofs of tall buildings. The Manacled Bridge Jump: Hou-

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dini handcuffed and chained, like the Dying Slave, hurtling himself into murky waters. His expanded bare chest, stubborn stocky bowlegs (both helped with the slack), goofy untamed hair: Houdini returning to his circus roots—acrobat, contortionist, high-wire act, and, it must be said, something of the sideshow freak. There are no escape clauses in escape acts; now the risk *was* the act.

And they came; by the thousands, the tens of thousands. Bridges and riverbanks stampeded with spectators; traffic marooned in streets paved with hats. They weren't the raucous roaring crowds of the circus, or fans rooting for their champion on the vaudeville stage. They were mobs, there to see Houdini dead or alive—and either way it was a winning situation.

Houdini's career by this point recalls Kafka's tale, "A Hunger Artist." The Hunger Artist lives in a zoo. Fasting is his art. Once upon a time he was a star attraction, touring the world with his act. In town after town everyone turned out to marvel at his feats and cheer him on. His contract limited the length of his fasts, and a chalkboard tracked the days. As the end approached, they came from near and far to keep silent vigil at his cage. (Sound absurd? How about sitting and staring at a curtain for however long it took? Audiences in the Midwest were said to be the most patient.)

But crowds are fickle; overnight they lose interest. *What did they care about fasting?* the Hunger Artist asks. Now, ignored by crowds and keepers alike, he can fast to his heart's content. Because he has to fast, because he can't help it; he had never found the food he liked. At last the Hunger Artist achieves perfection: he dies. Even as he's swept up, straw and all, a new star is taking his place: a young panther whose "noble body seemed to carry freedom around with it, too."

Of all of Kafka's Jewish parables, "A Hunger Artist" might be the most Kafkaesque, expressing the longing for health, simple pleasures, and a normal life. Not the panther is the rival here, but the crowds. Everyone knows feeding time is the biggest sensation at the zoo. This could also be a fable of failing celebrity.

THE WAR cut Houdini off from half his public and his revenues; in Germany alone he had been booked five years in advance. He was still one of the most famous men in the world, the highest paid performer in vaudeville, a household word. His name appeared in advertising endorsements, popular sheet music, children's ditties, and, eventually, the dictionary: "Houdinize: To release or extricate oneself (from confinement, bonds, or the like)."

Turned down by the draft—he was in his forties—Houdini went all out for the war effort, organizing another charitable brotherhood, becoming a top fund-raiser at Liberty Bond rallies, entertaining the troops with patriotic extravaganzas featuring live eagles flapping out of hats, five-dollar gold pieces flung to the doughboys. All this on his own dime. It was inevitable that he should take a flier in Hollywood, venue of the rabbis' sons and their wildest dreams. What were *The Perils of Pauline* but Houdinizing?

Immigrant Jews, who had seen the possibilities of mass production for mass markets in the garment industry, had been no less quick to see the future in mass entertainment. They *were* the masses. From serials to feature films, to his own production company, starring in his own scripts (he kept a sweatshop of writers busy with his ideas), to investing in the latest technology, to planning a chain of movie houses, soon Houdini was dreaming of empire.

What went wrong? He might have been the greatest mogul of them all, but there was only one role for him. Putting on weight, losing his hair, as poker-faced in the clinches as in feats of derring-do, he was no matinee idol. But that wasn't the trouble. The movies, which suspended reality, made moot the suspension of disbelief. The medium was the magic. Not everyone could be a Valentino, but anyone could be a Houdini.

There remained one more act, another metamorphosis—the trick the rabbi's son always had up his sleeve.

A MAGICIAN AMONG THE SPIRITS

Houdini was a street kid. His formal schooling probably stopped when he hopped that freight car. It took years to get rid of his sidewalk-and-gutter speech, and he may never have rid himself of a sense of contradiction as a not quite literate Jew. But few men have had his guts and his smarts and fewer still his acquaintance with the run of human types, from crooks and con men to kings and queens. He learned the most at the bottom.

The hustlers he'd known took advantage of human nature—greed. The spirit mediums were taking advantage of grief.

Tables tipping, chairs thumping, banjos and tambourines floating in air, gauzy ghosts, mediums drooling messy ectoplasm (known in the trade as "geek effects") and chatting up the dead—the spirits were nothing if not practical jokers. No one could fall for such slapstick and fakery and things that go bump in the night. No one but the be-

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reaved, longing to hear again from their loved ones, to be told they weren't lost and gone for good, only waiting on the Other Side. The war had decimated a generation of the young; a worldwide flu epidemic, following hard after, killed many times more. The apples were ripe. Never was there an audience more willing to suspend disbelief.

Houdini had been a medium and mind-reader himself, quitting when he realized that people actually believed he could do what the spirit mediums said they did. He knew their tricks—they were his own; it was all a lot of Houdinizing. He was king of handcuffs, master of manacles, monarch of leg shackles, the greatest escape artist of all time; Houdinizing was his game. And as for supernatural powers, though there were those who swore he had them, Houdini was not one to settle for second billing.

Testifying at legislative hearings, lecturing at universities, investigating on scientific panels ("It takes a flim-flammer to catch a flim-flammer"), exposing spirit techniques in his own stage routines—no one ever said Houdini wasn't competitive. The Lord had delivered them into his hands. But there was more to it than that. More than a mockery of magic, the spirit act was a mockery of mourning, a mockery of the dead. And grief was sacrosanct to Houdini.

When his mother was alive, he would lay his ear to her comfortable bosom and listen to her heart; when she died, he visited Machpelah Cemetery, New York's necropolis, every chance he got and knelt to lay his ear to her grave. Granted, sentimentality is a form of exhibitionism, and there was a staginess in all his relations, as if they were publicity stunts. And he was always attracted to places of confinement. In his mind-reading days he had done his legwork checking out inscriptions on local tombstones; in his travels he made a point of visiting the final resting places of once-famous magicians and—usually with a photographer handy—planting wreaths on graves. Solemn-faced, he posed against these maudlin backdrops, all in black, his hat over his heart.

But this is when it all came out. For taking on the spirit mediums, Houdini was called a Red, an agent of the Pope, a kike, a sheeny, "a low-minded Jew," and received many threats. America was in a fervor of nativism. The golden door was shut. There were quotas on immigrants, quotas on rabbis' sons. *The spirits will get after you.*

Maybe you know the end of the story. It was the fall of 1926 and the tour was off to a bad start. In Providence, Bess came down with ptomaine poisoning; in Albany, Houdini fractured an ankle being lowered into the Water Torture Cell. Resting backstage in Montreal, he received a couple of students from McGill, where he'd lectured on superstition. Enter another student, nervously talkative. Was it true that Houdini's cast-iron belly could withstand any blow? Would he mind giving a demonstration? Houdini had never made any such claim, but neither did he ignore a challenge. As he began to rise, the young man—much younger, and much bigger—came out swinging, blows so deliberate, so vengeful, the other two barely managed to drag him away.

Houdini gave his performance in pain and passed a terrible night on the train to Detroit. The doctor summoned by Bess insisted that he be hospitalized. But the house was sold out, a crowd would be waiting, and crowds were fickle. The show must go on. Questions about his death may never be laid to rest, but this much is known: Houdini gave his last act in a high fever, with a broken ankle and a burst appendix.

"Houdini's secret," Bess would say, "was Houdini."

WHAT WAS the food Houdini craved?

Ascetic Houdini, who neither smoked nor drank, who slept no more than four or five hours a night, was always in training, testing his body, torturing it, he said. Swallowing and regurgitating billiard balls to strengthen his throat muscles; submerged in coffins underwater to study slowing his heartbeat and holding his breath; immersed in bathtubs of ice to inure himself to cold. It takes a lot of practice to make a little magic. Prince of the Air, Wild Man in a Cage, Daredevil Houdini, whose noble body carried its freedom around with it: he could be the Hunger Artist and the panther both.

The escape act is also a disappearing act. How did he get away with it? This suggests what, now, can no more than *be* suggested: the force of his personality.

Many photos, a few film clips, a rare recording of his voice—but where's the magic without the magician? We live in a different world now. There have been some interesting books about Houdini; it would be hard to write a dull one. The earlier tend to hagiography, those more recent to psychological speculation about the Dark Side of Houdini. What was he escaping *from*? His dream of seeing his parents under the tree becomes Houdini witnessing the primal scene, and the escape is Houdini acting out his fear of death. True, the wags on the vaudeville circuit long before were touting his act as "The Death and Resurrection Show." But that was an in-joke, the shoptalk of show biz. The

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larger truth is that Houdini took the escape act as far as he could go without becoming the Hunger Artist.

Besides, who needs unconscious motivations? Houdini was all up front. He was an expression—a phenomenon—of his times, the extreme that raises the particular to the level of the general. The very peculiarity of his act tells us that. And he was an American phenomenon. How would he have fared as a German Self-Liberator? Or a Russian? On his Russian tour, an officer in full regalia stomped onstage and stopped the show. The audience sat in stony silence, the manager made himself scarce. The officer was a blueblood—and who was this little Jew? The magician knew the spell to make this joker disappear. "I'm a millionaire," he said. America was the challenge act—and the magic charm.

As between failure and death, the operative word for Houdini had to be failure. Failure was poverty, failure was hunger, failure was humiliation. The rabbis' sons knew it well: failure in America was real failure. He presented, as Jews often do, a test case: the mandate of the melting pot. His life was a spectacularly successful solution to the immigrant dilemma, the tragedy of the fathers, the liberty of the sons.

And that dream, that tree? Who can fail to sense the longing for the days of his dead parents' happiness; for the only piece of childhood he ever had; for the cost, the loss, the garden of Appleton? Not as a collector, but as a son, fulfilling a pledge, Houdini tried to buy back the sacred books his father had sold off in those bitter last years. And wherever he found himself on the anniversary of his father's death, in whatever farflung place, he sought out a synagogue where, wrapped in a prayer shawl, he could recite the mourner's kaddish. Metamorphosis comes at a price.

HE DIED on Halloween. He had promised—circumstances permitting—to return, or send some message from the Other Side. And if Houdini couldn't do it, who could? For ten years Bess kept the vigil, seated in a circle, holdings hands tightly grasping hers—like a medium in one of those séances Houdini had so zealously denounced. But there would be no return engagement; there would be no more magic.

And yet in one of his last photographs something of the sort seems to have happened. There is aging Houdini, in greasepaint, eyebrows stenciled, lips rouged, his arms bared above the elbow, his bald forehead gleaming. He stands inside a hoop slung across his shoulder, its paper cover a shattered sunburst. His hand extends in a practiced flourish. The spangle of the Big Top. Someone, something, has just jumped through. But who? Where? No one's there. Only Houdini, the ringmaster, presenting Houdini.

EPILOGUE: "I was there to pick up his props." In her juggling act as Houdini's wife and widow, Bess is the unsung heroine of this story. She died in a railway compartment, just as, along with ships' cabins and hotel rooms, she had spent so much of her life with Houdini. She was buried in a Catholic cemetery, taking no chances with the next world. Her gravesite alongside his remains empty. In 1973, the bust of Houdini on the monument over the Weiss family plot at Machpelah was smashed by vandals. It was restored by the Society of American Magicians, of which he'd been so staunch and contentious a member. In 1995, part of his irreplaceable collection was lost in a fire at the Houdini Museum in Appleton. Police determined that the cause was arson and investigated the case, still unsolved, as a hate crime.

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OBSERVATIONS

Oprah, Elie Wiesel, and My Fellow Christians

Christopher M. Leighton

WHEN OPRAH speaks, America listens. When Oprah points, America turns and looks. Perhaps most stunningly, Oprah can wave a book in front of us, and some of us may even put down our television remotes and plunge into its pages.

Her recent selection of *Night*, Elie Wiesel's classic memoir of the Holocaust, as this month's book-club feature on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* promises to capture the attention of a huge audience that still knows little or nothing of that shattering and defining catastrophe of our time. In her broadcasts with Wiesel, scheduled to include a filmed visit to Auschwitz, we will see an African-American woman stepping into the kingdom of night and marching among the shadows. This educational odyssey may open the door to new understandings, not least between Christians and Jews.

CHRISTOPHER M. LEIGHTON, *a new contributor, is a Presbyterian minister. For the past twenty years, he has served as executive director of the Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies in Baltimore, Maryland.*

Who can object? Why should I, in particular, be vexed with doubts? Wiesel's book served as my initiation into issues that have shaped my life's work in the field of Christian-Jewish studies. I continue to find his masterpiece, published as *La Nuit* in France in 1958, and in this country in 1960, to be one of the most searing portraits ever composed of the Holocaust, and I am impressed that Oprah had the daring to choose it as the focal point of her own and her viewers' encounter with that earth-shaking trauma. Why, then, do I have so little confidence that this unique combination of talents will work any miracles within our collective psyche?

My unrest is generated by a suspicion that the reading and discussion of Wiesel's *Night* will constitute the entire curriculum. Thanks to the power of the largest book club on the face of the globe, the American public will travel to Auschwitz, survey a limited parcel of a vast and complicated landscape, and fail to notice an array of difficulties much closer to home—meaning the mental and cultural home inhabited by so many of my fellow Christians. Literary genius and cathartic TV may momentarily captivate us, but most viewers are likely to pass through the experience secure in unexamined and potentially dangerous assumptions.

MY ANXIETY has three aspects. The first arises out of the intimate character of the book's narration. A Jewish boy from a small town in Eastern Europe is swept into the machinery of mass murder, and readers are held spellbound by a voice recounting events in a world twisted beyond recognition. We see these events unfolding through the eyes of a child, whose grip on his family, his faith, and his sense of self is methodically broken. We enter a realm of radical uncertainty and despair, our gaze forbidden to extend beyond the barbed wire that encloses and contains it.

And here is the problem. In the world that Wiesel portrays, the organizers of genocide lie outside the perimeter of the camp and hence outside the uninformed reader's ken. The politicians who devised the plans, the bureaucrats and technocrats who executed them with

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deadly efficiency, remain faceless. There is no reckoning with the carefully choreographed performance of mass murder.

Similarly, we pass though Wiesel's narrative without noticing Hitler's "willing executioners," the ordinary people who obediently followed instructions or acquiesced through their silence. Many of them were products of the best educational system on earth; most had been baptized in the very heartland of Christendom. The silent majority did not want to know too much. They were busy, they did not want to run afoul of the authorities or put themselves and their families at risk. They turned a blind eye to the atrocities. The righteous, those who risked their lives to save the innocent, were rare exceptions who proved the rule.

But the commanding voice that issues from the crematoria requires that we confront the ideological underpinnings of this mass murder, and this confrontation lands us on the doorstep of the Christian tradition. Over the centuries, Christian teachings cultivated the soil of hostility out of which sprang a pervasive contempt for Judaism and the Jewish people. The ethos of disdain was amplified in the traditional Christian interpretation of the Bible, disseminated through the work of brilliant theologians, reinforced in preaching and liturgical practices, and embodied in art and architecture.

Today, most Christians are oblivious to this disturbing heritage, or are prone to deny its virulence and durability. That is so despite the overwhelming consensus among historians, and in recent decades among many church hierarchies, that the animus embedded within Christianity was in fact an indispensable precondition for the emergence of modern anti-Semitism. For that reason, the Holocaust lays a particular obligation on Christians, and disarming this still-toxic bias is a Christian imperative of the utmost urgency.

Wiesel's *Night* provides a window onto the horrifying experience of the victims; it does *not* hold up a mirror, compelling Christians to confront the underbelly of their own tradition. I would like to believe that, going beyond the confines of the book, Oprah will explore the currents of Christian anti-Judaism that animated the perpetrators of the Holocaust and paralyzed the bystanders. In so doing, she would help many Americans, especially Protestants, meet a difficult challenge, and make a contribution of her own to the revolutionary witness first voiced by the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council in 1965, when it issued the declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

But, for reasons that constitute the second aspect of my anxiety, I have my doubts.

CHRISTIANS LEARN to read and interpret the world through the lens of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. By placing their own struggles within the light of this story as it is told in the Gospels, they are enabled to discern meaning in the midst of human failure, order amid chaos, and hope in the thick of despair.

What happens when Christians "read" Wiesel's *Night* through the prism of their own sacred story? What, if anything, does the Christian narrative help reveal about the realities Wiesel confronted? What does the Christian view of the world conceal, or distort, about this quintessentially Jewish experience?

I have yet to meet a reader of *Night* who has not come away limping from the encounter. Wiesel's memories are indelibly imprinted on the imagination of anyone with the stamina to turn the pages. Few accounts of the Holocaust, indeed, are as effective in helping readers *feel* the harrowing metamorphosis of a human person into a victim. Yet this identification, made possible by Wiesel's artistry, may deliver catharsis without yielding either historical understanding or theological insight. Specifically, Christians can imaginatively enter this memoir and situate its horrors within their own religious framework: the framework of death-and-resurrection.

In one of the most poignant moments of the book, Wiesel recalls the Nazis' execution of a young boy. The child is suspended on a gallows between two men. As the prisoners are lined up and forced to witness the hanged victims, they cannot avoid the boy, who is too slight for the rope to have completed the job of strangulation. The child's agony as he dangles helplessly between life and death evokes the question: "Where is God?" And Wiesel answers out of the depths: "Where is He? This is where—hanging here from this gallows."

The words signal a breakdown of faith. To Jewish readers in particular, they may seem words of ultimate protest, an indictment of the God Who once acted in history to redeem His people Israel, but Who in this most critical hour of need has failed to deliver them. Perhaps there is the faint echo of the Psalmist's lament, intended to rouse the Lord from His slumbers. Yet God's silence ruptures hope. The overwhelming awareness of His absence, His betrayal, threatens to shatter the very possibility of faith. The narrator, a young man raised in a pious Jewish home, is left with a numbing loss, an emptiness that nothing can fill.

For many Christian readers, however, this episode resonates very differently. Where Jews find evidence of God's absence, Christians discover, in the midst of anguish and darkness, a confirmation of God's redeeming *presence*. Entering into the heart of darkness, God refuses to abandon those who call upon Him. No wonder many Christians have read Wiesel's portrait as "the cruci-

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fixion of the Jews," and the murders of Auschwitz as sacrificial offerings, atoning for the sins of humanity.

The inference is all but irresistible—an ingrained religious reflex. François Mauriac, the French Catholic writer who did so much to bring *Night* before the public, expresses just this view in the book's foreword:

> Did I explain to [Elie Wiesel] that what had been a stumbling block for *his* faith had become the cornerstone for *mine*? And that the connection between the cross and human suffering remains, in my view, the key to the unfathomable mystery in which the faith of his childhood was lost?

ONE MAY ask: so what? The fact that, staring into Wiesel's abyss, Jews and Christians may derive a divergent set of meanings need hardly disturb us. Each religious community regards the world through its own narrative spectacles, reaching disparate conclusions. What is wrong with that?

What is wrong is this: Mauriac's musings are indicative of a longstanding tendency to force the horror of the Holocaust into the contours of the Christian story. But once the irreducibly singular character of Jewish suffering under Hitler is situated under the shadow of the cross, becoming subordinated to the pain of the man from Galilee who took on the sins of the world 2,000 years ago, the fate of a million and a half murdered Jewish children becomes overlaid with a theological significance that falsifies the very essence of a people's catastrophe.

The tortured screams of those children and their parents did not mend the world. Nor was theirs a sacrificial offering that can reestablish the bonds of intimacy between God and humanity. Any effort to squeeze the Jewish community's pain into a Christian paradigm compounds the original violence with another layer of violation.

Indeed, the domestication of Jewish pain by means of comparison with Jesus' execution indicates a failure on the part of Christians to understand the mystery at the heart of the crucifixion. As the disciple Peter reminds Christians, the fundamental human reflex in the presence of disfiguring pain is either to turn away or to gawk in fascination from a safe distance. The crucifixion challenges Christians to confront someone else's affliction, a confrontation that brings them to a place that they have never been before and from which there is no return to the comforts of home. Imposing a transcendentally fixed meaning on the suffering of others distorts that challenge.

Differently stated, an encounter with the Holocaust brings Christians face to face with the limits of their own theological prowess, compelling them to reexamine the claim that new life invariably follows in the wake of death. If they decline the challenge, they will read and interpret Wiesel's *Night* in ways that simply reaffirm what they have always known. They will learn nothing from the encounter either about others or about themselves.

THE THIRD aspect of my anxiety arises from readings of this book that end up enshrining the Jewish people as "victims." That is understandable enough. In Wiesel's memoir, the imagination of the reader is seized by the demonic alchemy of the Nazi genocide, which indeed flattened and transmuted everyone into a helpless victim. But this sliver of historical experience does not begin to suggest the depth and breadth, the diversity and heterogeneity, of Jewish culture, let alone convey a sense of the core values of the civilization being assailed and destroyed.

I wonder how many of Oprah's viewers will misread this destruction as a proof of the Jewish people's immutably tragic destiny. In the early pages of the book, Wiesel presents the Jews of his town as skilled in the practice of denial and avoidance, habits that seem to have blinded them to the Nazi program of mass murder. Rather than mounting a campaign of armed resistance or pursuing strategies of escape, they continue to trust in the underlying goodness and rationality of humanity. The suggestion seems unmistakable that an irrepressible aptitude for hope has historically bred a dysfunctional passivity. All the other heroic resources of the Jewish tradition appear to have broken easily under the boot of the Nazi occupiers.

In the land of Auschwitz, the Jews are simply delivered up to death. Yet even the slaughter of millions fails to appease the Nazi appetite, which only grows by what it feeds on. Is this, then, the Jewish fate—endless recapitulations of the destruction of the Temple, of the Crusades and Inquisition, of the expulsions and pogroms? Or is this murder something altogether unique?

No doubt many readers, empathizing with Jewish suffering, will see a certain grandeur in the ability to endure and to survive a long history of affliction. But the role thereby assigned to God's chosen people hardly meshes with the record of, for example, the Jewish community of the United States, which has scaled the ladder of social success, achieved enviable economic stability, and actively contributed to every aspect of our national life. Nor does the status of victim fit the state of Israel, which has successfully stood up to the onslaught of its Arab enemies in the conviction that only military might and political grit will secure its future.

The resulting dissonance has had baleful implications. Today, in the querulous reactions of many European and American Christians to Israel's unblinking refusal to sub-

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mit to Arab terrorism, we have seen all too clearly the distorted moral priorities of a world prepared to welcome Jews only when they follow an ancient script, achieving tragic nobility through impotence and passivity—through sacrifice. Any Holocaust curriculum that does not move beyond Elie Wiesel's *Night* will fail to teach mainstream American Christians the falsity and dangerous arrogance of that stereotype.

THERE MAY be educational possibilities lurking within my doubts. Christians and Jews live entangled in a web of complex relations, and neither can hope to grasp the significance of their own tradition, much less each other's, without exacting labor. A reading of Wiesel's masterpiece will not substitute for that labor. Sooner or later, we will need to travel the road out of Auschwitz. One can only hope that Oprah's visit to Wiesel's camp of ultimate horror will signal a beginning and not an end to that journey.

ART

David Smith's Vision

Steven C. Munson

DAVID SMITH (1906-1965) is generally considered one of America's greatest sculptors; he was also one of the most influential American artists of the 20th century. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth, the Guggenheim Museum in New York City has organized a major retrospective.*

The exhibit, which includes more than a hundred sculptures from all periods of Smith's career, as well as a roomful of drawings, reconfirms both Smith's importance and the greatness of his finest work. But the show also raises questions about the various series of monumental pieces that he created in the last decade or so of his life, and in so doing points to two larger issues: the nature of Smith's originality, and the relationship between American and European modernism.

The standard view is that, like a number of American Abstract-Expressionist painters who were his friends and contemporaries, Smith was primarily influenced by Cubism and Surrealism—but that once these influences had been absorbed, he went on to develop a larger-scale, more powerful, and more fully "American" form of sculptural expression. In considerations of Smith's career, the "general tendency," as Carmen Gimenez, the curator of the Guggenheim show, writes in the exhibition catalogue, "has been to concentrate on what he accomplished during his final fifteen years at most, and to consider the rest a more or less promising preamble."

The show Gimenez has organized goes a long way toward redressing this imbalance. It presents many superb examples of Smith's work from the 1930's and 40's in iron, steel, bronze, and combinations of these materials. These clearly show the progression of his development, how he struggled to give coherent expression to the various impulses that animated his art, and how he synthesized modernist European influences into an original yet clearly derivative sculptural style—one that seems all the more remarkable in light of his modest, and apparently uninspiring, beginnings.

BORN ON March 9, 1906, in Decatur, Indiana, Smith was raised in Ohio. His father was a telephone engineer and part-time inventor; his mother, a schoolteacher. While in high school he studied cartooning through a correspondence course offered by the Cleveland Art School. He attended Ohio University, but

STEVEN C. MUNSON's *review of* Matisse the Master *by Hilary Spurling appeared in the December 2005* COMMENTARY.

* *David Smith: A Centennial* will be on view at the Guggenheim through May 14, after which it can be seen at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris (June 14-September 11) and the Tate Modern in London (October 25-January 14, 2007).

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only for a year, and later Notre Dame, from which he dropped out after two weeks.

In 1925, Smith went to work at the Studebaker car factory in South Bend, Indiana, where he learned riveting, soldering, and welding—skills that would later prove critical in his decision to become a sculptor. In 1926 he took a job in Washington, D.C., studying art at night at George Washington University. Not long afterward he moved to New York City, taking another job and, on the advice of a woman he met in his apartment building—Dorothy Dehner, who would become his first wife—enrolling at the Art Students League. There he studied under the American "Ash Can" school painter John Sloan and with Jan Matulka, a Czech-born artist whom Smith would later credit as his most important mentor. As he put it in a statement quoted in the catalogue, "It was from [Matulka] that for the first time I learned of Cubism and Constructivism. Then the world kind of opened for me."

Indeed it did. Having started out as a painter, Smith soon turned to making painted constructions as well as sculptures out of found objects. Several of the latter, including the charming *Untitled (Coral Bird)* (1933) and the highly expressive figure-like abstraction *Untitled (Lyndham)* (1932), are among the first objects one sees at the Guggenheim.

What is striking about these early works, as well as about some of Smith's Surrealist drawings of the early 1930's, is that, as if his instinct were unlocking his imagination, he seems to have just picked up from where some of the leading modernists were at that moment, among them the Spanish sculptor Julio González. To quote him again, "I also learned a lot at that time from just looking at reproductions, mostly in European magazines. I first saw Picasso—[and] then his iron construction in *Cahiers d'art*—and I realized that I too knew how to handle this material."

This remarkable statement of self-recognition says a good deal about the primary sources of Smith's inspiration. It is also true that traditional ideas of sculpture (think, for example, of Auguste Rodin or Constantine Brancusi), which entail the modeling or carving of form out of a central mass, seem to have held no appeal for Smith. His sculpture of the 1930's and 40's, like that of Alberto Giacometti, which it most often recalls, was instead pictorial in nature, dependent on compositional elements of painting involving lines, points, and planes in the creation of a "transparent" object that is sometimes best viewed frontally rather than from all sides. Indeed, the term "drawing in space" has come to be almost synonymous with Smith's pre-mid-1950's oeuvre, whose linear character is often breathtakingly evident.

One can see this at the Guggenheim in the early and roughly fashioned iron-and-steel *Reclining Figure* (1933) and in the smoothly elegant and purely abstract *Reclining Figure* (1939-40), also of iron and steel but consisting not of bent and corroded metal but entirely of small rods, some straight, some bent, conjoined by small metal balls. The dynamism of this work is one of its chief attractions, just as a sense of flowing yet contained movement is one of the leading characteristics of Smith's art in general.

In *Dancer* (1935), *Aerial Construction* (1936), and *Billiard Player Construction* (1937), the jutting, thrusting, and curving metal shapes are given structural integrity, expressive force, and a certain Smithean élan by metal "lines" that unify the whole in a tightly conceived Cubist "armature," imparting a feeling of more or less continuous multi-directional movement. The Cubist framework is even more explicit in *Bathers* (1940), which, like many of Smith's best works, seems both entirely abstract and yet clearly suggestive of the human figure. Looking at this piece (and others) from different angles reveals its many expressive manifestations, as one form emerges and takes momentary precedence while another temporarily recedes, or one shape suddenly changes its character before your eyes (and you see one, two, or perhaps four bathers in all).

In other works, the Surrealist element is dominant. *Reclining Figure* (1936) is clearly derived from Giacometti's *Woman with her Throat Cut*, and *Interior* (1937) and *Interior for Exterior* (1939) recall the master's *The Palace at 4 AM*. Yet there is no question that *Interior* is itself a small masterpiece, despite the fact that its antecedents are unmistakable. One can only marvel at its delicacy, its freshness, and the perfection of its mix of linear and figurative elements, which together suggest a fanciful scene or a narrative that, as is almost always the case with Smith, is left unexplained.

THIS POINTS to another important facet of Smith's art—namely, the personal, symbolic, or anecdotal content that is often suggested in his sculptures, even some of the most abstract. A fair amount of critical energy has been expended in musing about the precise nature of this content and how the art conveys it; the catalogue for the Guggenheim show includes a lengthy compilation of excerpts from reviews of Smith's work that offers plentiful examples. But very little of this critical labor of explication is helpful in appreciating Smith's art. It is not that the emotional or narrative content is not important; it clearly is. But knowing the supposed details of its meaning or source adds nothing to, and may in fact detract from, the pleasures of responding to his wonderfully inventive ways of shaping abstract forms out of down-to-earth materials.

Nowhere are these forms more compelling, or more purely and completely realized, than in the mature works in which his applications of Cubist and Surrealist aesthetics culminate, among them *Helmholtzian Landscape* (1946), *Blackburn, Song of an Irish Blacksmith* (1949-50), *The Forest* (1950),

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Star Cage (1951), *Hudson River Landscape* (1951), and *Agricola IX* (1952) and *Agricola XIII* (1953). Even the gloomily oppressive *The Cathedral* (1950) has a force and authority that are difficult to ignore, although its clear political meaning is somewhat clichéd.

On the whole, Smith's best works are characterized by an unfettered yet disciplined exuberance of feeling that one finds irresistible; these are creations of the utmost lightness *and* weight, delightfully free in composition, strong in expression, and often liberating in effect. They are full of artistic conviction and realized intention, rooted in the modernist traditions upon which Smith drew so heavily.

THE SAME, unfortunately, cannot be said of many of the pieces Smith produced in the 1950's and 60's. *Australia* (1951), widely regarded as one of his masterpieces, misses the mark, partly because the anthropomorphic element (the sculpture resembles a large insect) has come too much to the fore and partly because of its size. At nine feet long, it is much larger than Smith's earlier table-top-size sculptures.

As one critic has written, *Australia* "marks a major change in Smith's work and in many ways stands as a dividing line between two phases of his career . . . it foreshadows the monumental works of the 1950's and 60's." The examples of these larger works on display at the Guggenheim are remarkable for their variety and experimental character, but one cannot help feeling that in embarking on the path of monumentalism, Smith began to lose his way.

At the risk of overgeneralizing, I would say that these later works look and feel as if the impulses behind their making have been inhibited or otherwise blocked. Smith's concept of overall form has become radically simplified, but also flaccid; consequently the pieces tend to suffer, to one degree or another, from either a lack of strength and rigor or a loss of energy and spirit—or both. To quote one of the few negative critical responses from the period in question (the mid- to late 50's), Smith had come to seem "flat, a far less interesting sculptor than in his vigorous early work. His giant, stainless steel figures are bigger, sharper, and more mechanistic but hardly more meaningful than Tinker Toy figures."

This strikes me as an accurate assessment of the works from the *Tanktotem* series that are on view at the Guggenheim. Much bulkier and more serious are the sculptures in the *Voltri* series. They include *Voltri VII* (1962), five bent flat elongated steel shapes clearly suggestive of human figures in various poses of dejection or weariness standing atop the horizontal bar of a two-wheeled vehicle of some kind; and *Voltri VIII* (1962), a large piece consisting of an upright gourd-shaped sheet of steel "holding," at a perpendicular angle, another sheet of steel folded over twice, the whole faintly suggesting an abstract human figure in a pose of some pathos.

These works, and others, seem rather lumbering attempts at personifying something no doubt intended to be important but unsuccessfully conveyed. One gets a similar impression from the *Cubi* series: very large, purely geometrical agglomerations of polished steel boxes, cylinders, and discs. Like the drawings for them, also on display, they seem static, lifeless, even arbitrary.

ACCORDING TO one lonely critic, writing in 1980, Smith "was the first and best of American sculptors, but by no means the greatest sculptor of the century, and the large *Cubi* compositions of the early 60's, on which his public reputation mainly rests . . . , now seem ponderously self-important."

This was not, however, the general view, let alone the view of Smith's most ardent champions, one of whom had written in 1965 that the *Cubi* sculptures were "possibly the greatest works Smith ever produced. . . . [evoking] that sense we have when an artist seems no longer content to 'interpret' reality but to want to compete with it in mastery."

Yet, perhaps without realizing it, this critic may actually have put his finger on what went wrong with Smith's efforts to make monumental art in his later years. For is it any wonder that an artist seeking to "compete with" reality "in mastery" would end up creating objects that are "ponderously self-important"?

In pursuit of a grander vision, Smith seems to have produced works of an increasingly hermetic quality, as if he had turned his art inward and in so doing constricted his own once vital imagination. Or, to put this another way, he appears to have been most inspired and most complete when working more as a European modernist than as an American one. The more "original" his sculpture became in appearance, the less it had in it of the complex Smithean sensibility that so fully and freely infused his earlier work. His greatest formal accomplishments were also his most personal; as the sculpture got bigger, the personal element got lost.

To make truly great monumental art requires a certain kind of genius. To take an example from literature, *The Iliad*, as one scholar has remarked, may well be ten times longer than the usual ancient Greek song, yet its structure not only carries the weight of its length but distributes it in such a way as to renew continuously the work's own motion and spirit. Not all great artists can achieve that kind of monumentality.

But this hardly diminishes what they do achieve, even if it is of more modest proportions. The Guggenheim show has done much to clarify David Smith's achievement as well as the limitations of his art. Perhaps it will eventually contribute as well to clarifying the achievements and limitations of other artists in the era in which he played so important a part.

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Saving Lipatti

Terry Teachout

Of all the well-known classical musicians active in the first half of the 20th century, which one profited the most from the invention of sound recording? Virtually every one made at least a few records, and most recorded extensively and representatively. Yet even legendary figures who became closely identified with the phonograph, like the singer Enrico Caruso and the violinist Fritz Kreisler, were known mainly for their public performances, not for their records. The notion that a classical performer might become famous by playing in a recording studio rather than before live audiences was unthinkable—until Dinu Lipatti came along.

Lipatti, who died of Hodgkin's disease in 1950 at the age of thirty-three, was acclaimed throughout the last years of his tragically brief life as a pianist of the very first rank. The composer Francis Poulenc spoke of his "divine spirituality," while Alfred Cortot, his best-known piano teacher, described him as "a second [Vladimir] Horowitz." Yet, outside his native Romania, Lipatti would no longer be remembered were it not for his recordings. His career was only just getting under way when World War II began, and by the time the war was over his illness had started to make it difficult for him to perform in public.

Fortunately, the English record producer Walter Legge made a heroic effort to document Lipatti's playing before it was too late, first in the London studios of HMV and later at a radio station near the pianist's home in Switzerland. Though Lipatti left behind not quite four hours' worth of studio recordings, most of them done between 1947 and 1950 (as well as several radio broadcasts later released on LP and CD), these were sufficient to secure his reputation as one of the 20th century's foremost pianists, and the first to be known primarily for his recordings instead of his concerts.[1]

For all of his posthumous renown, few of Lipatti's admirers know anything about his life beyond the sketchy accounts included in the liner notes to his recordings. It is not generally appreciated, for instance, that he was also a composer whose small but beautifully crafted body of work was full of promise. Nor does the English-language literature on Lipatti contain a candid discussion of his conduct in World War II, or of his decision to emigrate to Switzerland shortly before Romania

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[1] All of Lipatti's postwar studio recordings are available on five CD's. EMI Classics 66596 has works by Chopin, including the complete waltzes, the *Barcarolle*, and a nocturne and mazurka. EMI Classics 67003 offers Bach's B Flat Partita, Mozart's A Minor Sonata, two Scarlatti sonatas, and four Bach transcriptions (plus a 1950 broadcast of two Schubert impromptus). EMI Classics 67567 presents Chopin's B Minor Sonata, Liszt's *Sonetto del Petrarca 104* and Ravel's *Alborada del gracioso*. EMI Classics 67775 contains the Schumann Piano Concerto, accompanied by Herbert von Karajan and the Philharmonia Orchestra (plus a 1950 broadcast of the Mozart C Major Concerto conducted by Karajan). EMI Classics 74802 has the Grieg Piano Concerto, accompanied by Alceo Galliera and the Philharmonia (plus a 1950 broadcast of the Chopin E Minor Concerto). Except as indicated, these CD's include all of the pieces mentioned in this article.

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was occupied by the Soviet Union.[2]

Above all, there has been no adequate consideration of Lipatti's place in the evolution of modern classical-music performance practice. Thanks to the dramatic story of his illness and death, he is remembered not as a historical figure but as a near-mythic one who made some of the most beautiful piano recordings of the century. Yet these recordings, powerfully compelling though they were and are, do not exist in a cultural vacuum. To the contrary, they were made by a profoundly self-aware artist who was in every sense a man of his time.

LIPATTI'S EMERGENCE as a world-class modern musician was all the more surprising in light of the fact that he was born into a provincial classical-music culture. The violinist-composer George Enescu (1881-1955), his godfather and teacher, was the first Romanian musician to become widely known in Western Europe, and the only one before Lipatti to have a major career. Lipatti's parents, however, were both serious amateur musicians—his father, a career diplomat, had studied violin with Pablo de Sarasate and Carl Flesch—and no sooner did his own youthful talent become apparent than they encouraged him to cultivate it.

He started improvising at the piano as a small child (Lipatti's mother, a competent pianist, later told Walter Legge that "he could play the piano before he had learned to smile") and performed in public for the first time at the age of six. Five years later he became a full-time student at Bucharest's Royal Academy of Music, graduating in 1932. The following year he took part in the International Piano Competition in Vienna, whose jury included such distinguished artists as the pianists Wilhelm Backhaus and Alfred Cortot and the conductors Clemens Krauss and Felix Weingartner. Cortot resigned from the jury in protest when the other jurors denied Lipatti the first prize only because of his youth.

In 1934, Lipatti and his family moved to Paris, where he studied piano with Cortot and composition with Nadia Boulanger. He made his Paris debut the following February, and from then on was acknowledged as a musical master in the making.

Had Lipatti been a less remarkable pianist, it is possible that he would have won much wider recognition as a composer. At first he was heavily influenced by Enescu, one of the post-romantic modernists who, like Béla Bartók in Hungary and Ralph Vaughan Williams in England, believed that folk music could serve as the basis for a distinctively national style of classical composition. Then Boulanger introduced him to the Bach-based neoclassical modernism of Igor Stravinsky. Out of these two contrasting approaches, he forged a style that owed much to Enescu (and, later, Bartók) but was becoming increasingly personal in the handful of large-scale works he completed in the 40's, which Boulanger rightly saw as "proof of a real creative gift."[3]

Not only was Lipatti a promising composer, but he could easily have made a name for himself as a critic. This he proved in a series of reviews published in 1939, the most provocative of which is an account of a Paris recital by Vladimir Horowitz:

> So long as he was guided by his instinct as a musician, and by the sensitivity of his youth, Horowitz remained above criticism. Today, however, perhaps influenced by his relationship with [the conductor Arturo] Toscanini, he is trying to explore the works he is performing to make them interesting. In fact, he is trying to transform them. . . . Horowitz will be the most extraordinary pianist of all times the day he is content to accept himself as he is.

But, amazingly varied as were his gifts, in the end it was the piano that meant most to Lipatti. After 1939, he wrote nothing more for publication, and completed only four large-scale musical compositions (as well as two groups of art songs). When Boulanger warned him that he needed to devote more time to composition, he replied, "I know this very well, but I cannot tear myself away from the piano. If you only knew how much I love 'him.'"

BY THEN Lipatti was on the verge of launching an international career. Instead, he returned to Romania in the summer of 1939, not long before war broke out. The best-known version of what happened next comes from Walter Legge, who notes that Lipatti stayed in Romania until 1943,

> when, together with his fiancée Madeleine Cantacuzeno, he escaped from Bucharest, and by devious ruses and routes they arrived, via Stockholm, in Geneva with a joint capital of five Swiss francs.

All this is true—so far as it goes. But Legge fails to mention that, starting in 1941, Lipatti gave concerts in Germany, Italy, Austria, and other Nazi-controlled countries.[4]

[2] The only book-length study that has appeared in English to date is *Lipatti* (1971), by Dragos Tanasescu and Grigore Bargauanu, two Romanian musicologists. Not surprisingly, their discussion of the pianist's relations with the governments of Nazi Germany and postwar Romania is guarded to the point of euphemism.

[3] In 1943 Lipatti recorded his own *Concertino in Classic Style* (1936), an attractive but derivative neoclassical exercise à la Boulanger, and a *Sonatina for Left Hand* (1941) in which he made highly original use of a compositional language derived from Bartók's third-period style. These performances, along with contemporary studio recordings with Enescu of the violinist's Second and Third Sonatas, are part of *Enescu si Lipatti Interpreteaza Enescu si Lipatti* (Electrecord EDC 430/431, two CD's), a Romanian import available through amazon.com. Most of Lipatti's other works have been recorded by Romanian artists, but none is currently available on CD.

[4] Desmond Shawe-Taylor's entry on Lipatti in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* is similarly unforthcoming.

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These appearances were not isolated events. Between 1941 and 1943, Lipatti had performed throughout the Axis (of which Romania was a part), and nowhere in the excerpts from his correspondence included in the English-language edition of his biography does he voice any doubts about the propriety of having done so.

Legge's misrepresentation of Lipatti's wartime activities was almost certainly deliberate. The producer was notoriously indifferent to the equivocal political histories of such German and Austrian musicians as Wilhelm Furtwängler and Herbert von Karajan, whom he made a point of recording for HMV after the war. Indeed, Legge went so far as to marry the German soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, who had joined the Nazi party as a teenager. It would have been in character for him to cover up the awkward fact that another of his "discoveries" had played for Nazi audiences during the first part of the war.

As for whether Lipatti himself had any Nazi sympathies, this cannot be determined from the documents published in English. It should be noted, however, that not only did he settle in neutral Switzerland in 1943, but he was later befriended by such impeccably anti-Nazi émigrés as Artur Schnabel and Arturo Toscanini, who would have shunned him had they suspected him of being an outright Nazi collaborator (as the Frenchman Cortot had been). It seems at least as likely that, as he would claim in a 1947 letter to a Romanian friend, "I have never been mixed up in any kind of politics," and it appears that he remained in Switzerland after the war in order to avoid becoming entangled with Romania's newly installed Communist regime.

Whatever the truth of the matter, it is indisputable that Legge first heard about Lipatti from Francis Poulenc in Paris in 1944. Though the pianist had cut a few records with Boulanger for French HMV in 1937, his only recordings since that time had been made in Berlin, Bucharest, and Geneva, and were unknown elsewhere.[5] After hearing him play the Chopin E Minor Concerto, Legge signed Lipatti to a contract with HMV, and began recording him in 1946.

Recording made it possible for Lipatti to indulge to the fullest his perfectionism. "I do not want to give any more concerts—except as rehearsals for recording," he told Legge. "Let us give our lives to making records together." Alas, his recorded repertory was restricted by his fast-failing health, as well as (one suspects) by his producer's near-complete lack of interest in modern music. Only one 20th-century piece, a breathtakingly virtuosic 1948 version of Ravel's *Alborada del gracioso*, was released by HMV. What survives is a small but representative group of works by the composers whose music he played most frequently in concert after the war: Bach, Mozart, Schumann, Liszt, and Chopin.[6]

The salient quality of these performances has been well described by Legge in his remarks about Lipatti's legendary 1950 recording of his signature encore, Dame Myra Hess's transcription for solo piano of Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring":

> It is impossible to explain, to those who have not experienced the wonder of his playing of this piece, its rapt beauty and fascination. It was always the first encore he played, and for him it was a prayer and utterance of thanksgiving to God. The sound was not of this world, it hovered in space like some celestial blessing.

For once, what may seem poetic license is only the simple truth: Lipatti's performance of Bach's limpid meditation on a Lutheran chorale is a miracle of lucidity and balance. From Cortot, the greatest of French pianists, he had learned the secret of playing with a lambent yet full-bodied tone, and no matter how often one listens to his recording, to hear the familiar melody singing out through the serenely flowing triplets of the accompaniment is to be entranced anew.

Just as characteristic is his similarly celebrated 1948 recording of Chopin's *Barcarolle*, Op. 60. Unlike "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," the *Barcarolle* was recorded by several major romantic-era pianists, including Cortot, Horowitz, Benno Moiseiwitsch, Vladimir de Pachmann, and Arthur Rubinstein, all of whom employ the freely flexible *rubato* heard in the recordings of classical musicians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To be sure, each *rubato* is distinctive: Cortot colors the essentially steady flow of his playing with engagingly impulsive fluctuations of tempo, whereas Horowitz tinkers with the underlying rhythmic pulse so much as to make it hard to follow. Nevertheless, all five pianists vary the pulse at will for expressive purposes, often to a degree that many of today's listeners would find obtrusive, even tasteless.

Lipatti's *rubato*, by contrast, is less explicit, consisting in the main of a discreet ebb and flow that he uses with great subtlety to sculpt Chopin's phrases. The pulse is always clear and coherent, thus creating the illusion of a single, unified arc of rhythm that sweeps the lis-

[5] In 1937 Lipatti and Boulanger recorded seven Brahms waltzes for piano duet and the accompaniments to the *Liebeslieder Walzer*, Op. 52 (Pearl GEMM CD 9994). In addition to the wartime performances reissued on *Enescu si Lipatti Interpreteaza Enescu si Lipatti*, he also recorded Enescu's Third Piano Sonata (this performance is included on EMI Classics 67567).

[6] EMI has also released a CD containing radio broadcasts by Lipatti of the Bach D Minor Concerto (played in the piano arrangement of Ferruccio Busoni), the Liszt E Flat Concerto, and Bartók's Third Concerto (EMI Classics 67572). Illness prevented him from recording Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata and Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*, both of which figured prominently in his recital programs. (Lipatti played the "Waldstein" Sonata for the BBC, but no tape is known to exist.)

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tener through the piece. This gives his interpretation a cumulative force that is absent from less rhythmically unified performances, and prepares the way for a climactic peroration that is appropriately grand but in no way grandiose.

AFTER HEARING Lipatti play a Chopin concerto, Toscanini told him, "At last we have a Chopin without caprices and with the *rubato* to my liking." Yet, though he had studied with Boulanger and played the music of Bartók and Stravinsky, Lipatti was not a "modern" pianist in the ordinary sense of the word.[7] While his *rubato* was much less capricious than Cortot's, it was free enough to make him ill at ease with the stricter, Toscanini-like style of the young Herbert von Karajan, with whom he recorded the Schumann Piano Concerto in 1948. "I did not count on an unexpected factor, a remarkable but superclassical conductor who, instead of helping my timid romantic *élan*, put a brake on my good intentions," he wrote in a letter to a friend. Nor was Lipatti a rigid textual literalist. As he explained in an unpublished note written shortly before his death:

> Far from me is the thought of rendering predictable the anarchy and disdain for the primary laws which guide, along general lines, the coordination of any valid and just interpretation. But I find that one would commit a grave mistake by searching for useless details regarding the way in which Mozart might have played a certain trill or gruppetto. . . . Never approach a score with dead eyes or the spirit of the past because you might find yourselves only with Yorick's skull.

Thus it is perhaps more accurate to think of Lipatti's playing as a synthesis, a kind of halfway house between the golden-age romanticism of older pianists like Cortot and the cooler, more restrained neoclassicism of the 20's and 30's. Indeed, one might almost be tempted to call him a transitional figure were his playing not so fully realized on its own distinctively individual terms. The impassioned lyricism of his 1947 broadcast of Bartók's Third Concerto suggests that his way with 20th-century music would have been no less convincing than his playing of Mozart and Chopin.

BUT IT was not to be. Though cortisone suppressed the symptoms of Lipatti's illness long enough for him to record in Geneva in July 1950 and to play a Mozart concerto with Karajan the following month at the Lucerne Festival, his condition thereafter deteriorated with shocking speed. In mid-September he gave a solo recital at the Besançon Festival in France, by which time he was so sick that he was unable to play the last of the Chopin waltzes he had programmed and had to substitute the less technically demanding "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring."[8] Ten weeks later he was dead, having spent the last hour of his life listening to a radio broadcast of Beethoven's F Minor String Quartet. "You see," he told his wife, "it is not enough to be a great composer. To write music like that you must be a chosen instrument of God."

Much of what has been said about Lipatti since then is but an echo of what the grieving Walter Legge wrote about him in 1951:

> Dinu Lipatti had the qualities of a saint. The spiritual goodness of his nature, his modesty, his gentleness, his will's firm purpose, his nobility and loftiness of thought and action communicated themselves to all who met him, and to the remotest listeners in the halls where he played. His goodness and generosity evoked faith, hope, and charity in those around him.

No doubt this, too, is true—most of his friends and colleagues said more or less the same things about him. But it is not necessary to ascribe sainthood to Dinu Lipatti in order to marvel at the poetry of his playing. Had he not made records, it is unlikely that such fervent paeans to his artistry would have been taken seriously by later generations. Instead, we can hear for ourselves, and know that his untimely death robbed the world of a supremely great artist. Though he was no Franz Schubert, one can only recall the epitaph written by a friend of that great and short-lived composer: "The art of music has here entombed a rich possession, but far fairer hopes."

[7] In his broadcasts Lipatti can occasionally be heard improvising brief preludes to the pieces he is playing, a 19th-century practice that also characterizes the live recordings of such turn-of-the-century pianists as Josef Hofmann.

[8] This recital was broadcast, and an aircheck of the performance, originally released on LP in 1957, is now available on CD (EMI Classics 62820).

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Books in Review

Between Duty & Desire

The Moral Imagination
by Gertrude Himmelfarb
Ivan R. Dee. 260 pp. $26.00

Reviewed by
Michael J. Lewis

When Gertrude Himmelfarb published *Lord Acton: A Study of Conscience and Politics* in 1952, Victorian culture still seemed a chamber of horrors—aesthetic, intellectual, and otherwise. Such, at least, was the picture painted by Lytton Strachey in *Eminent Victorians* (1918), which looked pityingly on the 19th century as a long diversion from the great path of the Enlightenment, until Freudian psychology and modernism in the arts would set the wheels turning once more.

To correct this vision has been the thrust of Himmelfarb's career as a historian. In a succession of books and essays (including in Commentary), she has explored the Victorian response to such varied subjects as poverty, marriage, and Darwinism, and in the process has done much to rehabilitate Victorian culture in all its complexity, nuance, and bracing sense of moral and social responsibility.

This new volume of essays pays tribute to twelve writers and thinkers whom Himmelfarb has found praiseworthy or admirable, and who have helped mold her own mind. Not all of them are Victorians, though all, with the exception of Lionel Trilling, are English. First and foremost, however, they are writers: not only authors of fiction like Jane Austen and Charles Dickens or philosophers like Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill but also politicians like Winston Churchill and Benjamin Disraeli, each of whom wrote well enough to live by his pen. But her approach to these writers is not really literary. She has little to say about the peculiarities of authorial voice or diction, or cadence and tone. Her ear is not so much musical as moral, and it is here that she listens most carefully to what her subjects have to say.

Anyone who regards the moral universe as composed solely of obligations and prohibitions will wonder at Himmelfarb's title: must one bring imagination to a commandment? But for each of Himmelfarb's subjects, the moral universe was in disarray. Each, beginning with Burke, was writing against the immediate background of revolutionary change, in which new political, social, and religious circumstances had rendered personal obligations unclear. To find the moral path required not simply fidelity to received wisdom but an active and questing imagination. Indeed, Himmelfarb's title derives from Burke's celebrated essay on the French Revolution, whose cult of abstract reason had violently disrupted all those customs, responsibilities, and decencies that, as Burke memorably phrased it, were "furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination."

This is not to say that Himmelfarb's subjects are moralists, or even moral—only that they brought intellectual alertness to moral matters. George Eliot, for example, was hardly moral by Victorian standards:

Michael J. Lewis, *whose "Art for Sale" appeared in the March* Commentary, *teaches at Williams College and is the author most recently of* American Art and Architecture *(Thames & Hudson).*

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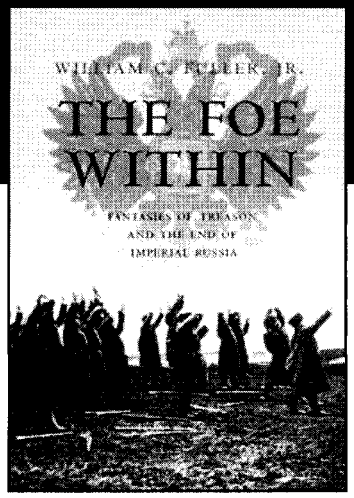

The Foe Within
Fantasies of Treason and the End of Imperial Russia
William C. Fuller, Jr.

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"*The Foe Within* is a remarkable book. Through the prism of a World War I spy case it provides a rich account of the world of fin-de-siècle Russia. It reveals, better than any other study, the subterranean networks behind high politics in the last years of Imperial Russia and the divisions within Russian high society that set the stage for tsarism's collapse."

—Peter Holquist, author of *Forging Revolution*

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she lived for over two decades in an "irregular relationship" with George Lewes, a married man with three children (and a wife who had yet another three children by yet another married man). But far from being a libertine, indifferent to bourgeois morality, or a modern feminist committed to overturning that morality, Eliot worked to bring her relationship as much as possible under the conventions of middle-class marriage, whose condition and prospects form the subject of her greatest novel, *Middlemarch*.

That novel is the subject of one of Himmelfarb's most thoughtful essays here. Critics of *Middlemarch*, from Henry James to modern feminists, have faulted its heroine Dorothea for marrying the callow artist Ladislaw when she might have won the idealistic Dr. Lydgate, a scientist and a sort of Darwin surrogate who is seeking the "primitive tissue" that is the basis of life. But as Himmelfarb shows, Dorothea's choice, in the end, reflects her increasingly mature understanding of marriage. Where she once entertained the childish notion that "the really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father," she grows to accept marriage's net of complexities and obligations, even "its demand for self-suppression and tolerance."

These are no sanctimonious platitudes, for in Eliot's world the arbitration of duty and desire had been made immensely more difficult by the Victorian loss of faith (signaled by the presence in *Middlemarch* of Lydgate). Dorothea's admission that "now I hardly ever pray" is understood by Eliot not as a cry of liberation but rather as a sign of "moral chaos." For Himmelfarb, the abiding interest of *Middlemarch* lies in Eliot's attempt to sketch in fiction the prospects of marriage in a secular culture—a subject that has hardly gone away.

IT IS only natural in an anthology of occasional pieces and book reviews that some will be more satisfying than others. The piece on Churchill is brought down somewhat by the workmanlike qualities of the biographies it reviews; one wonders what Himmelfarb might have done had she addressed Churchill on her own and in his totality, as she does in the essays on Disraeli and Dickens. And in one instance—Lionel Trilling, the author to whom she stood closest personally—one wishes she had dealt with his 1948 essay in *Partisan Review* on the Kinsey Report, which, in pointing to the report's removal of sexual behavior from the web of social relationships that give it meaning, presciently analyzed a phenomenon—the impoverishment of sexuality itself in the name of liberation—that has only intensified over the ensuing generations. Perhaps more so than in his other essays, Trilling here displayed the quality of moral imagination that is the leitmotif of this book.

In general, Himmelfarb's most provocative essays are those in which she struggles with her own convictions. An example is the essay about John Buchan, "one of the last articulate representatives of the old England." Before his death in 1940, Buchan had managed to churn out 57 novels and biographies while rising to the governor-generalship of Canada. He is by far the least enlightened of Himmelfarb's subjects: a few apt quotations from his novels make clear not only his jovial bigotry ("a nigger band, almost looking like monkeys in uniform, pounded out some kind of barbarous jingle") but his now incomprehensible sense of duty ("There's nothing much wrong with me," an officer in one of Buchan's novels says drily. "A shell dropped beside me and damaged my foot. They say they'll have to cut it off.")

The very antithesis of a modern liberal, Buchan is nevertheless, for Himmelfarb, much more than a specimen of imperial fatuity. She shows that he was able to write so convincingly about the English

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world of the church, the university, and the club because he was an outsider to all of them, and saw them with peculiar vividness.

A Scottish Calvinist who had studied at Glasgow before entering Oxford in 1895, Buchan came to adopt the attitudes of an English Tory "by choice and principle" rather than out of unconscious prejudice or economic self-interest. As a result, he could respond to new events with an alert intelligence. A novel like *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) might display the conventional anti-Semitism of the day ("a little white-faced Jew in a bath-chair with an eye like a rattlesnake"), but two decades later Buchan was one of the first prominent British intellectuals to attack Nazi anti-Semitism and endorse the cause of Zionism. Outdated as much of his outlook has become, he remains a subject of enduring interest.

Other essays are chiefly of biographical interest, such as one on *The Knox Brothers* (1977), Penelope Fitzgerald's high-spirited account of her father Edmund and his brothers Dillwyn, Wilfred, and Ronald. The intellectual flowering of this family was extraordinary, developing in two generations from a curate's tyrannical household where flogging was common and novel-reading was prohibited to produce a cryptographer, an editor of *Punch*, and two priests, one Anglo-Catholic and the other Roman Catholic—all of them distinguished, and all of them variously disappointing to their Anglican father. Here, as throughout, Himmelfarb shows her great flair for evoking a personality by means of a few telling details.

Himmelfarb delves into the personal lives of her subjects not out of prurient interest but with a humane eye and abundant sympathy. One has the sense that their personal foibles and quirks ultimately matter to her because the moral sense cannot be cultivated entirely in the abstract or in schematic terms; it is expressed in the network of specific obligations to specific people in specific circumstances.

This echoes the tendency of her career in general, which has been to stress the English philosophical tradition and its skeptical empiricism over the utopian abstractions and rather less than utopian track record of its continental counterpart. One sees here the fulfillment of the intellectual trajectory that began with her work on Lord Acton, the thinker who drew the widest possible lessons from the French Revolution, and not only from the Jacobin tyranny in which it culminated but from the various species of reactionary tyrannies that succeeded it.

This is the conservatism of the mid-19th century, chary of all tyranny and suspicious of all concentration of power. Here Gertrude Himmelfarb's intellectual pedigree takes its start, and from it there derive the insight, broad tolerance, and capacity for intelligent empathy that she brings to her subjects in this book, as to the subject of the moral imagination itself.

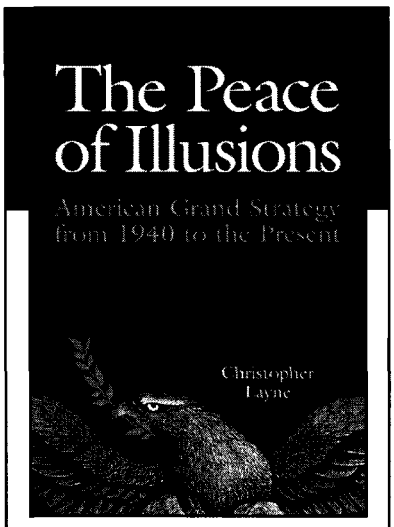
In the Casbah

My Battle of Algiers
by Ted Morgan
Collins. 304 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Roger Kaplan

A well-known journalist and biographer, Ted Morgan, born Sanche de Gramont, was as a young man a reluctant conscript in France's last colonial war. Morgan arrived in Algeria in September 1956, two years into the gruesome and complex struggle that would

Roger Kaplan *has written widely on French politics and on Algeria's Islamist insurgency of the 1990's.*



The Peace of Illusions
American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present
Christopher Layne

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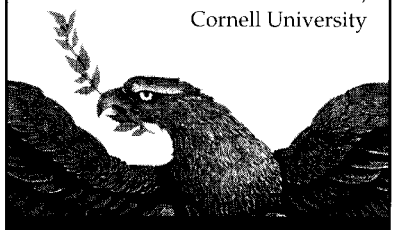

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put an end to France's 130-year North African empire. Now, five decades later, he writes that the *guerre d'Algérie*, which Algerians call their revolution, is worth recalling because of its role in the invention of modern Arab terrorism. But he also means to come to terms with an experience that in his own eyes left him morally compromised, and that remains a subject of sharp political controversy.

Military historians and moral philosophers may quarrel about just what constitutes modern terrorism, Arab or otherwise. But the terrorism of the Algerian nationalist insurgents, which was deliberately aimed at civilians, seemed at the time unprecedented—more cruel and immoral, Albert Camus wrote, than anything envisioned, let alone carried out, by such earlier proponents of terrorism as the Russian nihilists or the Spanish anarchists.

The French response, too, was unprecedented. Torture is no doubt as old as warfare, but this was probably the first time a liberal-democratic regime permitted its own soldiers to apply such methods systematically. To restore security in the capital city of Algiers, French forces rounded up and tortured thousands of Muslims and a few score of their European allies, mostly members of the Algerian Communist party, often killing them in the process or afterward. For recalling this—without regret—in a memoir published five years ago, a retired French general officer named Paul Aussaresses was taken to court and found guilty of justifying torture, a crime in today's France.

IN THE matter of precedents, Morgan reminds us that, from the start, the Algerian revolution combined terror, conventional military operations, and atrocities on both sides. Even before hostilities started, pro-independence demonstrations in some areas had degenerated into gruesome murders, to which the French responded with massive naval and aerial bombardments that killed thousands of innocent villagers. When the uprising began in 1954, the first victims of the insurgents were policemen, a local Muslim village leader, and a school teacher recently arrived from mainland France: a fair sampling of insurgent targets throughout the war.

Morgan's recounting of subsequent events follows the generally accepted historical record. By 1956, the leadership of the National Liberation Front (FLN) had marginalized or killed rival nationalists, organized rear bases in the newly independent states of Morocco and

SPINOZA AND SPINOZISM

STUART HAMPSHIRE

Among the great thinkers of modern times, only Spinoza created a complete system of philosophy that rivals Plato's, with crucial contributions to every major philosophical topic. Hampshire's classic 1951 book *Spinoza* remains the best introduction to this thinker, and it is reprinted here. But what gives particular interest to this new volume is the first publication of Hampshire's last work "Spinoza and Spinozism," an extended presentation of a Spinozist philosophical worldview. Hampshire's influential 1962 essay "Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom" is also included.

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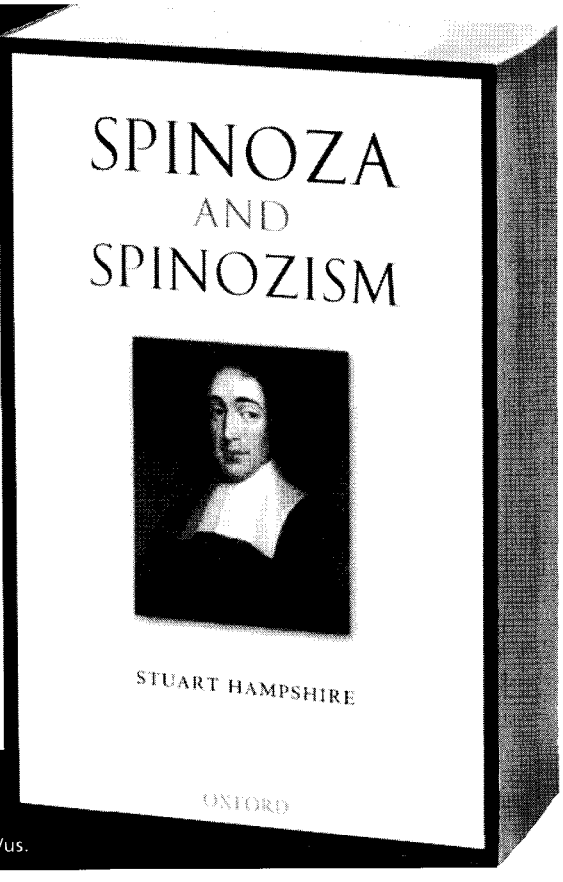

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Tunisia, and made the decision to take the rural guerrilla war into Algiers, a city of 600,000 Europeans and 300,000 Muslims, most of whom were concentrated in the casbah (fortified old town) that rises steeply from the city's harbor.

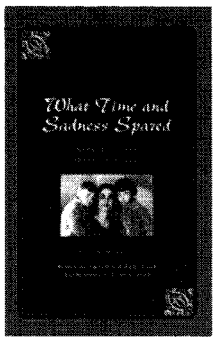
The strategy had three aims: to gain international attention for the insurrection, to scare the French, and to radicalize both sides. It worked: with the local police unable to stop the apparently random bombings, the (Socialist) government in Paris gave full powers to the 10th paratroop division. It was commanded by General Jacques Massu, a tough veteran married to a nurse, Suzanne Rosenberg, who wanted to win over Arab hearts and minds.

This was no flagrant contradiction. Massu and his colonels, notably Marcel Bigeard, were veterans of the French defeat in Indochina. In their bitter experience there, they had met an enemy who would stop at nothing—propaganda, deception, torture and terror—to win. Believing with some justification that they were facing the same kind of enemy in Algeria—the FLN received East-bloc support—they assumed they should adopt his rules of engagement. At the same time, however, they tried to counter the Muslims' negative view of France. They knew the system in French Algeria needed overhauling, and they took the initiative with army-run educational and social services.

In the final analysis, however, it was the French use of torture that won what was dubbed the battle of Algiers, by overcoming the FLN's strategy of intimidating or assassinating informers. The 10th division's commanders defended the torture and death-squad activities of Aussaresses's unit and others by maintaining that the FLN's tactics were themselves barbaric, and that they could not secure the city or target insurgent safe houses unless they could get information as quickly as possible.

Massu's methods succeeded. But by encouraging both sides' hardliners, the success prolonged the war. Charles de Gaulle, who returned to power in 1958 with widespread support both on the mainland and in Algeria, sought at first to continue the dual aim of winning the war while instituting reforms (against the will of the *colons*, or European Algerians, who thought the securing of their principal city had given them an indefinite lease on life). But even with an army of 400,000 driving the Muslim forces into mountain hideouts, compromise with the FLN proved impossible. Nor was there any other negotiating partner, since the FLN had eliminated all rival move-

What Time and Sadness Spared



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Pontius Pilate

Roger Caillois
Translated by
Charles Lam Markmann
with an introduction by
Ivan Strenski

"Roger Caillois' *Pontius Pilate* is a fascinating critical fiction that rewrites scripture and history and in the process gives the reader much to think about. The story turns around the crucial problem—as relevant today as it was in 1961—of the dilemma of Western reason, or at least skepticism, confronting, in a colonial setting, the passion of a political milieu that does not distinguish between revolutionary action and religious enthusiasm. Ivan Strenski's introduction does an excellent job of setting Caillois' novel in its historical, philosophical, and literary context."—**Allan Stoekl, Pennsylvania State University**

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ments and enforced internal discipline with Stalinist ruthlessness.

French Algeria, begun in 1830 as a somewhat frivolous military adventure that soon turned into a war of conquest and extermination, ended in 1962 in a final rampage of scorched earth, serial murder, and terror, this time committed by the irredentist *colons* as de Gaulle now led French public opinion toward withdrawal. The final French mission was to oversee the removal of nearly a million of these European Algerians while the Muslims who had served in French ranks were abandoned to savage reprisals. The rest were left to the rule of a single-party police state that would mismanage things for another 30 years until, in the early 1990's, a new insurgency, one that gave the world the term "Islamism," would again plunge the country into civil strife and terror.

THE SON of a French diplomat posted in Washington in the late 1930's, Sanche de Gramont grew up in the U.S. Well connected—John Negroponte, the scion of a prominent Balkan family, is a cousin on his mother's side—he was educated at Yale and was just beginning a career in journalism when duty called. Though he despised colonialism, he ruled out any thoughts of dodging the French draft and enlisted in officer candidate school, hoping that by the time he completed the extra months of training, the "events," as the French at first insisted on calling the war, would be over.

Instead, the young second lieutenant found himself at the front in a region near Algiers. There he witnessed what, in his telling, he still believes to have been the murder of an unpopular officer by his colonial troops. He also relates his own inadvertent beating to death of a prisoner. When he tried to have himself placed under arrest, his sergeant scoffed: "Don't be ridiculous. When you go to the *hamam* (steam bath) you sweat, and in war there are losses."

Through an American diplomatic connection, de Gramont met General Massu, who assigned him to a unit putting out a pro-French paper secretly funded by the army. The 10th division was swinging into action, and de Gramont had a ringside seat, in mufti, during the battle for the city. He used it to good effect. His sharp observations, retold now with a powerful feel for the drama of the time, re-create the dangerous mood of 1957 Algiers.

With friends on both sides—after all, he had his journalistic duties—de Gramont was able to cut a fairly wide swath through Algiers, including among the ladies, one of whom furnished him with FLN contacts. He was convinced then and still is today that, notwith-

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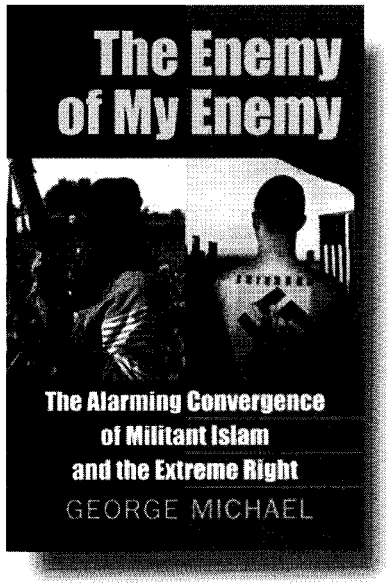

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standing the intentions of moderates on both sides, no compromise was ever possible. In leaving, one of his last acts was to assist an army deserter. When he returned in 1962, it was to cover the beginnings of independent Algeria for the *New York Herald Tribune*.

A few years ago, having long since exchanged his prominent French name for an American anagram, Ted Morgan caught a New York revival of *The Battle of Algiers*, an on-location reenactment of the famous battle, directed by Gillo Pontecorvo and produced by an FLN leader, Yacef Saadi. It may be indicative of Morgan's feelings about the war that he had never seen this famous historical drama when it first came out in the mid-60's with the help of the Algerian government and with Yacef Saadi playing himself in a rather flattering light.

At the screening in New York, Morgan writes, who should be there to present the movie but Yacef Saadi himself, "looking spry and fit at seventy-six." Yacef had organized the FLN terror campaign during the battle of Algiers, but was captured by the French. To avoid torture, according to Morgan, he cooperated, giving away the last holdouts, prominent among whom was a legendary hoodlum turned revolutionary named Ali-la-Pointe. But the movie tells a different story. In it, Ali is instead betrayed by a prisoner who succumbs to torture.

"I went up and introduced myself," Morgan writes, "surprised that [Yacef] had bowdlerized his true role." But, he adds, "since this was almost half a century after the events, I decided not to mention it."

Some observers today tend to see a replication of colonial relationships in any struggle between the U.S. and forces in what used to be called the third world. From this they deduce that attempts to intervene in the internal affairs of countries like Iraq are doomed. Morgan

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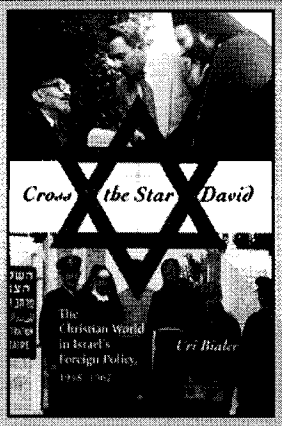

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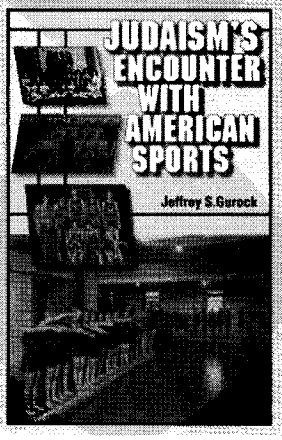

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does not say as much, but in a passing remark about his cousin John Negroponte's "irrelevant" tour as ambassador in Baghdad during a period when post-Saddam Iraq still had no government, a throwaway line to the effect that Iraq's "porous borders" render the American war there "unwinnable," and a few ironic comments on France's civilizing pretensions in Algeria, it is difficult not to see an implicit criticism of American foreign policy.

Still, as Morgan also notes, the fundamental differences are patent between Algeria back then, with its million European settlers, and Iraq today. Details matter, and the details in 1957 Algiers especially so. Ted Morgan's strength as a writer is to limit himself almost entirely to the details of his own time at war, and not to lose sight of its peculiarity.

Mastermind

Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism
by Steven B. Smith
Chicago. 256 pp. $32.50

Reviewed by
Clifford Orwin

LEO STRAUSS (1899-1973) led a quiet life. A Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany, he taught political philosophy first at the New School for Social Research in New York City and then, until his retirement, at the University of Chicago. Though he made a great impression on his students and provoked much controversy among his colleagues, Strauss never addressed the broader public and rarely commented on public policy. In his lifetime, he was not deemed newsworthy, nor did he seek to be so.

Not all scholars find tranquil graves, however, and lately Strauss has enjoyed an astounding notoriety. The *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *New Yorker*, and other leading publications at home and abroad have charted his alleged influence on key figures in the Bush administration. When the left-wing actor Tim Robbins staged an off-Broadway play about the war in Iraq, the villain whose portrait hovered over the stage was none other than Strauss. He is the supposed mastermind of what his critics understand by "neoconservatism"—critics, it must be said, who have seldom read any of his dense, erudite books.

Into this barrage of allegations steps Steven B. Smith of Yale, an authority on the history of political thought. Though Smith is too young to have known Strauss, he did study with Straussians (as Strauss's students tend to be called). Smith knows that Straussians come in many varieties, and he rejects the notion that they represent some kind of conspiracy. His own aim is at once theoretical and political: to demonstrate not just that Strauss was no reactionary, as his detractors contend, but that he was a committed friend of modern liberal democracy. As Smith puts it, he wishes to show that "there is such a thing as Straussian liberalism."

IN KEEPING with the basic divide in Strauss's own work, Smith separates his book into two large sections—"Jerusalem" and "Athens." The first of these concerns Strauss's engagement with the Jewish tradition. The product of a household that was religiously observant but not learned, he was a profound (if controversial) interpreter of Jewish thought, as well as a commentator on Jewish issues.

At a practical level, Strauss focused his attention on what he called the "Jewish problem"—the problem, that is, of being a Jew in the modern world. In a chapter on Strauss's rich relationship with Gershom Scholem, the preeminent modern scholar of Jewish mysticism, Smith shows that both men rejected assimilation as a solution to the dilemmas faced by their fellow Jews in Weimar-era Germany. For both, the answer most compatible with safety and self-respect lay not in accommodation with modern Europe but in Zionism, which Strauss embraced as a young man and staunchly supported throughout his life, even if, in contrast to Scholem, he declined to move to Palestine/Israel.

Still, to Strauss's mind, Zionism was not a satisfactory solution to the "Jewish problem." Noble and necessary as it was, it could never settle the deeper issue—namely, how to reconcile religious tradition itself with the claims of modernity. As Strauss put it, "finite, relative problems can be solved; infinite, absolute problems cannot be solved." The "Jewish problem" was infinite because, ultimately, it concerned the question of man's relationship to God.

Strauss rejected the notion, common among secularists, that modern thought had succeeded in refuting religious orthodoxy. Revelation, for him, remained reason's rival, an abiding alternative to the arrangements of secular society. Though he devoted much of his prodigious interpretive talent to the writings of Spinoza, the first and greatest partisan of the atheistic Enlightenment, Strauss thought that modern philosophy had achieved at most a stand-off in its confrontation with the biblical tradition. By his lights, the sharpest insight into the tension between revelation and reason could still be found in the work of Maimonides, who in the 12th century had made the defense of Judaism his first priority even while acknowledging the power and reach of Aristotelian thought.

AS SMITH demonstrates in turning to "Athens," Strauss was preoccupied not just with reason's limits but

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with the tendency of modern rationalism to devour itself. The same skepticism that the philosophers had unleashed on religion eventually drew their own claims into question as well, precipitating what Strauss called, in surveying his own era, "the crisis of the West."

In Strauss's analysis, this crisis was no less political than theoretical, and could be seen most clearly in the work of his greatest contemporaries. It was no accident, he argued, that the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger became an avid Nazi, or that Alexandre Kojève, the Russian émigré Hegelian, paid tribute to Stalin and Mao. Smith devotes a chapter to Strauss's relation to each of these thinkers, stressing in each case how seemingly abstruse and theoretical issues provided a key to understanding their embrace of the bloody politics of totalitarianism.

As an antidote to Heidegger and Kojève, who in their different ways had pushed modern thought to its most dangerous extremes, Strauss returned to Athens itself—that is, to classical philosophy. There he hoped to find a form of rationalism that was more compatible with political moderation and decency. In a chapter titled "Strauss's Platonic Liberalism," Smith describes how Strauss's resort to the supposedly illiberal Plato in fact served to bolster the case for liberal democracy.

In *The Republic*, which most contemporary scholars had dismissed as a blueprint for totalitarianism, Strauss discovered instead a profound meditation on the *boundaries* of politics. Unlike their 20th-century counterparts, Strauss suggested, ancient thinkers recognized the unbridgeable gulf between theory and practice. If they encouraged their readers to think radically, they also encouraged them to act moderately. Here, to Strauss's mind, was the best answer ever devised to the aspirations of modern tyranny.

The climax of Smith's attempt to rescue Strauss from his critics, especially those who consider him the progenitor of neoconservatism, lies in a final discussion offering a critique of the war in Iraq delivered in the name of Strauss himself. The discussion focuses on the Bush administration's definition of its goal as the elimination of political evil. By contrast, Smith emphasizes, Strauss always considered evil a permanent aspect of the human situation, and just as he stood against liberal illusions on this score, he would have objected no less strenuously to the illusions of present-day neoconservatives.

About the effort to pigeonhole Strauss as a neoconservative, Smith is undoubtedly right. But, to deal with last things first, his own effort to recruit Strauss to the anti-war cause is every bit as dubious. It is also an open question whether the current architects of American foreign policy have really been seized by the naive expectation of ending evil—as opposed merely to recognizing the need to fight it. Of one thing we can be sure: in politics, Strauss always insisted on calling things by their proper names. It is difficult to imagine that he would have objected to labeling 9/11 an act of evil; that is merely to call a spade a spade.

Still, as Smith is well aware, there is something futile in speculating about Strauss's views on this or that policy. Far more important is the task of coming to terms with his thought. In this regard, Smith's book is an excellent introduction, and can be read with profit by those already familiar with Strauss as well as by those coming to him for the first time.

As Smith makes clear, Strauss was not a political partisan in any usual sense. He viewed both liberalism

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and conservatism from above rather than from within. His real concern was with the broader question of how to preserve the constitutional polities within which alone such distinctions are meaningful. His path-breaking return to ancient thought, which his enemies mistake for proof of his antagonism to modern liberty, was, as Smith shows, precisely the opposite.

Strauss understood that the dynamic of modern thought itself had left liberal democracies stranded and bereft, stripped of intellectual support as ever more "advanced" theoretical outlooks favored an ever more radical politics. He would go anywhere in search of allies to defend the political achievements of the West—and he found them among the ancient philosophers, with their irony, prudence, and moderation. As Smith writes, Strauss "regarded the freedom of an educated mind as the best antidote to the pathologies of modern mass politics."

By opposing the complacent supposition that the wisdom of our own day had rendered obsolete the wisdom of past epochs, Leo Strauss challenged every vested interest in the modern academic world, and he paid the price in hostility and scorn. It would be a shame to compound that injustice by embroiling him in today's political controversies, a fact that Steven Smith recognizes even as he himself does just that.

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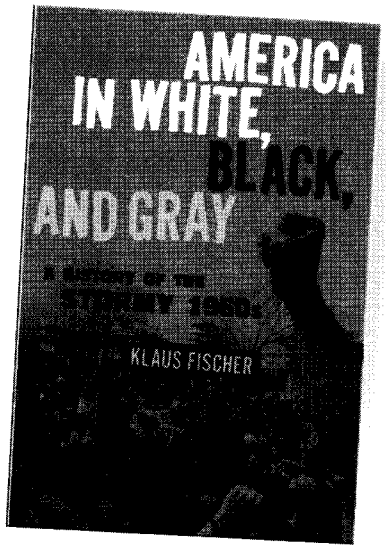

Klaus Fischer is the acclaimed author of *Nazi Germany: A New History* and *The History of an Obsession.*

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Holy Warriors?

Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia

by Rachel Bronson
Oxford. 368 pp. $28.00

Reviewed by
Jacob Heilbrunn

WHEN PRESIDENT BUSH declared in his recent State of the Union address that the U.S. is dangerously "addicted to oil" from unstable countries, Saudi Arabian officials were indignant. Saudi ambassador Prince Turki al-Faisal met the next day with national security adviser Stephen Hadley, who assured him that the President had not really meant what he said. It was yet another sign that, despite 9/11 and the stream of Saudi militants who even now are entering Iraq's Sunni triangle, the Bush administration is largely adhering to the decades-old American policy of coddling the sheikhs who sit atop the world's largest oil reserves.

JACOB HEILBRUNN *is a writer in Washington, D.C.*

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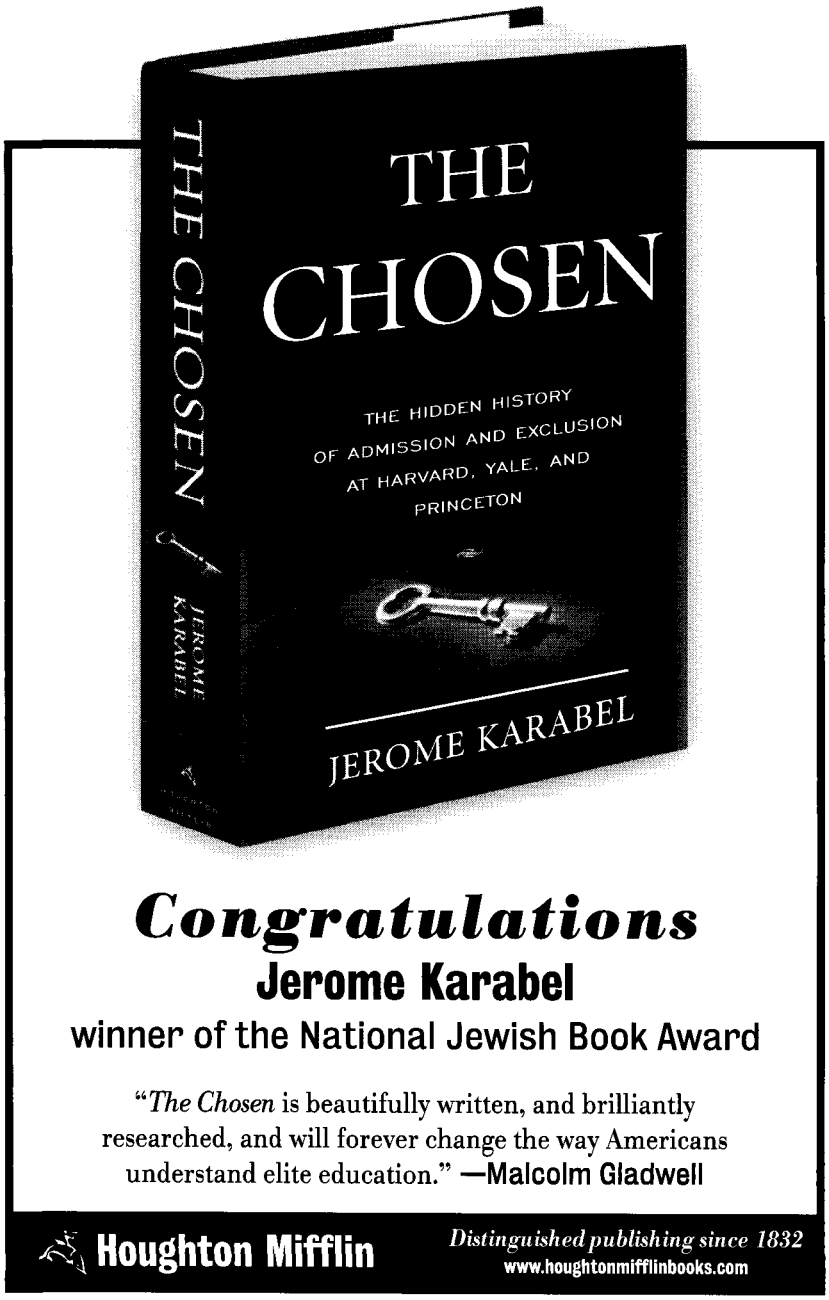
In *Thicker than Oil*, Rachel Bronson, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, offers a probing examination of the tangled history of U.S.-Saudi relations. An assiduous researcher, she expertly chronicles the actions of both sides from the 1940's down to the present. Oil naturally plays a prominent role in Bronson's story, but, more surprisingly, so too do anti-Communism and a shared religiosity, which she sees as key factors in solidifying U.S.-Saudi ties. The result is an informative and wide-ranging account, if not a fully persuasive one.

As Bronson shows, the U.S.-Saudi relationship has never been quite as smooth as diplomats on both sides like to pretend. The legend of the great friendship between the two nations began with the famous 1945 meeting between King Abdul Aziz and Franklin D. Roosevelt on board the *USS Quincy*, anchored in the Great Bitter Lake north of the Suez Canal. (To this day, she notes, the U.S. embassy in Riyadh occasionally trots out for display a glass-enclosed replica of the ship.) Returning home from Yalta, Roosevelt pursued two aims with the Saudi monarch. With the war still being waged in the Pacific, he was eager to ensure uninterrupted oil supplies to American troops. In addition, he hoped to persuade Aziz to avert conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. It was the first of a long line of presidential entreaties that would go nowhere: Aziz told Roosevelt that the U.S. should try to resettle the Jews in Europe.

If Roosevelt initiated the relationship, Harry S. Truman brought it to fruition. To the horror of most of his advisers, who warned that he might destroy our relations with the Arab states, Truman insisted on recognizing Israeli independence in 1948. The Saudis were indeed upset, but they swallowed their anger—in large part, Bronson argues, because of Aziz's fierce opposition to the Soviet Union. Not only did he invite the Americans to train Saudi forces, but he also granted them access to a military airstrip on the country's eastern shore, providing the U.S. with a base of operations in the region while also furnishing his nearby oil fields with a defensive shield.

With the rise of Egypt's Gamel Abdel Nasser, cold-war politics again intervened. At first, President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles thought they might cozy up to the Egyptian leader, especially after siding with him against France and Britain during the 1956 Suez Canal crisis. Soon enough, however, Nasser was denouncing the West and hailing the Soviet Union as a great liberating force for the third world. For help in the region, the U.S. had little choice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but to turn to Aziz's successor, the feckless and corrupt King Saud. As Bronson writes, Eisenhower left his successor, John F. Kennedy, with "a Middle East mess."

American delusions about the region persisted. Kennedy initially thought that, given enough good will and blandishments, he, too, could woo Nasser. The new President hoped that the modernization of states like India, Indonesia, and Egypt would be the hallmark of his administration. But Nasser's aggressive military moves, including an attack on Yemen that was meant to weaken Saudi influence, quickly exploded any such notion.

Nor was Saudi Arabia a reliable ally. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, approved large arms sales to the country in the mid-1960's, only to be repaid with Saudi support for an international oil embargo to punish the U.S. for backing Israel during the 1967 Six-Day war. Oil prices were sent soaring again in 1973 when OPEC followed the same course, a move engineered by a Saudi sheikh.

After the end of the embargo in 1974, Bronson observes, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia began to work more closely together, especially in trying to keep other countries out of the Soviet orbit. With the U.S. in full-scale retreat after Vietnam, the Saudis provided billions in foreign and military aid to Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Pakistan. By the 1980's, the Saudis were funding the Nicaraguan *contras* in the face of a congressional ban on U.S. support. "In Afghanistan, Angola, the horn of Africa, and elsewhere," Bronson writes, "Saudi Arabia's contributions helped the Reagan administration aid and abet anti-Communist activities on a worldwide scale."

Like many American cold warriors, the Saudis hated Communism, according to Bronson, at least partly because of its militant atheism. Indeed, she suggests, it is important to recall this commonality when looking at present-day U.S.-Saudi tensions. Though the kingdom's eagerness to disseminate its strict Wahhabi creed certainly contributed to the later rise of al Qaeda—a group whose core consisted of mujahideen from the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan—the religious enthusiasm of the Saudis is also what made them so stalwart an ally of the United States against the Soviet Union. The two countries were connected, in short, not only by mutual interests based on oil but by a principled opposition to godless Communism.

BRONSON SUPPLIES many fascinating details about the Saudi anti-Communist crusade, and in this regard convincingly shows that the interests of Riyadh and Washington coincided across a range of issues. Moreover, her book is mercifully free of the conspiracy-minded nonsense that permeates so many other recent accounts of America's historical relationship to its Middle East allies, including most notoriously Craig Unger's *House of Saud, House of Bush* (2004), which portrays the Bushes and their circle as servants of Big Oil in cahoots with the Saudis. Still, in her quest for evenhandedness and her eagerness to show other dimensions of the Saudi-U.S. bond, Bronson overreaches.

This is especially true on the question of religion, which she sees as a key affinity between the two countries right from the outset. As she writes, for instance, of the Eisenhower administration: "Oil by itself does not explain why, in the late 1950's, the United States sought to transform the Saudi king into a globally recognized Muslim leader. The Saudi leadership's claim to Mecca and Medina and the importance this had for America's anti-Communist agenda is a more powerful explanation." But is it? Bronson simply asserts what she has failed to demonstrate. A more plausible reading is that Saudi stewardship of Mecca and Medina was important to Eisenhower only insofar as it was a symbol of Saudi prestige and influence, and thus stability.

Despite Bronson's emphasis on religiosity, the Saudi ruling family, it must also be said, has been distinguished less for its piety than for its flamboyantly self-indulgent and ruinously expensive lifestyle. What is missing from her somewhat antiseptic volume is any real flavor of this ruling elite, which resembles less a government than an exotic and especially well-financed mafia.

Worse, in trying to show "how the cold war affected the rise of religion more globally," Bronson draws unfortunate parallels between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. In her view, the American counterpart to the Saudis' aggressive promotion of Wahhabism and jihadist militancy is the rise in the U.S. of Christian conservatives. As she writes: "Ronald Reagan's close ties with the American religious Right dovetailed nicely with his anti-Communist agenda." Yes, perhaps. But surely she does not mean to imply that, say, Bob Jones University can be usefully compared with the virulently anti-Western Saudi clerical establishment.

Nor do Bronson's attempts to find new common ground after September 11 between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. go much beyond the platitudinous. She seems to think it is just a matter of working out a few kinks in the relationship. "Today, Saudi leaders must work to address issues surrounding the financing of extremist thought," she says. "In return, Washington must find ways to help the pragmatists [in Riyadh] prevail in their domestic battle."

If only it were that simple. The U.S. has always been beguiled by the notion that Saudi Arabia is an island of moderation in a sea of radical Arab states, but that is an illusion. Saudi Arabia shows no signs of fundamental change, and even the Bush administration remains reluctant to demand it. For now, there is

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little reason to think that future chapters in the relationship will be any less uneasy than the ones recounted here by Rachel Bronson.

Rap Sheet

The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America

by David Horowitz

Regnery. 450 pp. $18.45

Reviewed by
Jonathan Kay

Like a number of other figures in the conservative world, David Horowitz once occupied a point on the left side of the political spectrum—in his case, a point near the leftmost edge. Unlike others, however, he seems never to have forgiven himself for it. As if for penance, he now devotes himself single-mindedly to debunking the anti-capitalist, anti-democratic, anti-American agenda of his erstwhile fellow travelers.

On the website he founded, FrontPageMag.com, as well as in newspaper columns and books, Horowitz has for some time now been offering detailed dossiers of individual radical activists, particularly on university campuses, closely scrutinizing their pronouncements, funding sources, and affiliations. Charges of McCarthyism hurled back from the Left have not deterred him. To Horowitz, his targets are not mere misguided utopians, but intellectually malignant enemies of the West. In *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*, he profiles the worst offenders.

The Professors is organized alphabetically, with each academic under-indictment being allotted his or her own ideological rap sheet. Most of the profiles are brief, two or three pages long. A number of well-known figures—Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, for example—are accorded more generous treatment. With a few exceptions, little biographical information is provided. Rather, the charge sheets dwell primarily on outrageous statements and deeds.

Horowitz's 101 case studies run the gamut from unreconstructed Marxists who continue to rhapsodize about the USSR's unfulfilled promise, to Islamists openly longing for Israel's destruction, to experts on postmodernism, postcolonialism, ethnic studies, and other faddish disciplines. Despite the heterogeneous backgrounds of those showcased, their convictions with respect to most major issues emerge as remarkably in tune, if not virtually identical

To those stamped from this mold, America is typically portrayed (in the words of Joe Feagin, a professor of sociology at Texas A&M) as a "total racist society" in which "every part of the life cycle, and most aspects of one's life, are shaped by the racism that is integral to [its] foundation." As for 9/11, it was a completely understandable response (according to Ron "Maulana" Karenga, a professor of black studies at California State-Long Beach) to "years of state terrorism, mass murder, selective assassination, collective punishment, and other forms of oppression by the U.S. and its allies."

Though such evils as institutional racism, globalization, and the war on terrorism are the major preoccupations of Horowitz's profiled academics, many are also obsessed with more obscure issues, from the merits of lesbianism—the "highest stage of feminism," according to Bettina Aptheker, a professor of women's studies at the University of California—to the demerits of "hetero-normativity." The latter doctrine, in the judgment of Michael Warner, a professor of English at Rutgers, serves to stigmatize promiscuous gay men by placing taboos on sex with total strangers.

A number of Horowitz's professors use their classrooms and publications to foment hatred of whites, Jews, and Christians. To Timothy Shortell, a sociologist at Brooklyn College, religious Americans in general are "moral retards." Hamid Dabashi, a professor of Islamic studies at Columbia University, maintains that Israeli Jews are congenitally predisposed toward sadism. José Angel Gutiérrez, a political scientist at the University of Texas, insists that "we have got to eliminate the *gringo* . . . and what I mean by that is if the worst comes to the worst, we have got to kill him." And, of course, there is Leonard Jeffries, still teaching black studies at the City University of New York and still apparently of the belief that blacks are "sun people," morally superior to white-hued "ice people," and that Jews are "a race of skunks."

Many will undoubtedly scorn *The Professors* as a species of right-wing snuff lit. There are, after all, 617,000 college and university professors in the United States. Naturally, some are going to be wing nuts. Wouldn't it be better to let them wither in obscurity?

But far from being isolated loons, many of those profiled in this book have national followings. In most cases, they have been spouting the same claptrap for decades, yet have been hired, promoted, and granted tenure nonetheless. Those few who have actually been taken to task by administrators for particularly repellent outbursts typically find themselves defended en masse by their colleagues. In this sense, *The Professors* is an indictment not only of one particular group of tenured radicals but of a larger academic culture that continues to tolerate, to apologize for, and to protect a set of hateful ideas and their proponents.

Nothing better illustrates this

Jonathan Kay *is a managing editor of Canada's* National Post.

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phenomenon than the career of the Native American activist and University of Colorado ethnic-studies professor Ward Churchill, who is the subject of a long introductory essay to *The Professors*. In October 2001, Churchill described the victims of 9/11 as "little Eichmanns" who had been rightly targeted as a "technocratic corps at the very heart of America's global financial empire." Soon after these comments were publicized in 2005, an investigation by the *Rocky Mountain News* revealed that Churchill had lied about his Indian status and his academic credentials; had plagiarized the work of other professors; and had filled his academic writings with invented facts.

Yet far from being cast out in disgrace, Churchill became something of a folk hero, at least in academic circles. On campuses across the country, professors and students signed petitions denouncing the "witch hunt" against him. When he appeared in public to defend himself at the University of Colorado, 1,500 supporters came out to cheer. Though Churchill eventually resigned as chairman of the university's ethnic-studies department, to this day he retains his tenured teaching slot.

THE WARD CHURCHILL saga is certainly disheartening. But it also raises an interesting question: how did this charlatan come to be who he is? What led him to acquire his poisonous ideas of America and its values—to the point where he would publicly dismiss the deaths of 3,000 mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers in such callous, lying words?

For that matter, how did any of these 101 professors acquire their bizarre and even pathological ideas, let alone the grim determination to express them? Horowitz does not tell us. And that is a shame, because one senses that behind each of his 101 cases there lies a story that might be not only fascinating but just possibly significant. Set alongside each other, Horowitz's assorted radicals give the impression of having been mass-produced by the academy. But as a former inhabitant of the far Left himself, and (as he has told us in memoirs) one who was to the manner born, Horowitz would seem particularly well situated to offer a more probing account. As it is, he gives us more than enough information to despise these thinkers, but not nearly enough to understand them.

The Poet's Poet's Poet

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& the Juke-Box
by Elizabeth Bishop
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Reviewed by
Sam Munson

ELIZABETH BISHOP'S complete published poetry fills one moderate volume. This goes some way toward explaining why she, who ought not need an introduction, unavoidably does. Bishop was reluctant to publish anything imperfect, and she could spend years shaping and reshaping a poem; such care exacts a price. Little of her work beyond the villanelle "One Art" enjoys the ubiquity that attends true fame.

But her reputation has only grown since her death in 1979, and so far she has also managed to avoid posthumous conversion either into a decadent reactionary, as was the case with James Merrill (a friend and admirer, and another poorly understood poet), or a bloodthirsty progressive, as was the case with Robert Lowell (a contemporary and aesthetic kin, and another great admirer and close friend). This is the sign of a sterling if highly idiosyncratic talent.

Bishop was born in 1911 in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her father died before her first birthday; her unstable mother was committed to an asylum when Bishop was five. She spent her early years with her mother's parents in Nova Scotia (a region she would have much poetic recourse to), returning to the care of her father's family in 1917. Bedridden and bookish, she began composing verse at the age of eight. Eventually she grew healthy enough to attend a private school outside Boston and then Vassar. After graduation in 1934, she divided her time among New York City, Massachusetts, Key West, and Brazil, where she spent eighteen years, beginning in 1951, mostly in the company of her lover Lota de Macedo Soares, the daughter of a newspaper publisher.

Bishop corresponded with Randall Jarrell, Lowell, and Marianne Moore, among others, and moved in exalted literary circles, enjoying recognition if not the acclaim accorded to some of her contemporaries. After Soares's suicide, she returned permanently to the United States and continued to write and teach, becoming poet in residence at Harvard in 1969 and publishing her last collection, *Geography III*, in 1976, three years before her death.

THE MOSTLY unremarkable circumstances of Bishop's adult life, complete with professorial stints and literary articles in the *New York Review of Books*, belie the astonishing peculiarity of her vision. Her poems, emphatically, are poems of the physical world; the joys and horrors they record are of a piece with the nobility and sordidness of human residence on earth. Landscapes—rural, urban, foreign, domestic, real, painted, or imagined—fascinated Bishop, and proved a fertile source for her uncompromising images. "Filling Station," one of her deservedly better-known

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poems, from *Questions of Travel* (1965), captures this:

> Someone embroidered the doily.
> Somebody waters the plant,
> or oils it, maybe. Somebody
> arranges rows of cans
> so that they softly say:
> ESSO—SO—SO—SO
> to high-strung automobiles.
> Somebody loves us all.

The lines are plain, intense, concrete, metrically witty. But it is the final "Somebody"—an effortless leap from the seen evidence of a gas-station owner's awkward solicitude to the sudden, suggested presence on earth of a mysterious, benevolent power—that demonstrates her moral seriousness. All of Bishop's concern for strange details, for the wildly various scenic composition of our lives and memories, spring from her preoccupation with worldly, perceptible love, and with the question of its existence.

The same preoccupation is apparent in these stanzas from "North Haven," a crushing elegy for Lowell, who predeceased her by two years:

> The Goldfinches are back, or
> others like them
> And the White-throated
> Sparrow's five-note song
> pleading and pleading, brings
> tears to the eyes.
> Nature repeats herself, or almost
> does:
> *Repeat, repeat, repeat; revise,*
> *revise, revise*
>
> . . .
>
> You left North Haven,
> anchored in its rock,
> Afloat in mystic blue . . . And
> now—you've left
> for good. You can't derange, or
> re-arrange,
> your poems again. (But the
> Sparrows can their song.)
> The words won't change again.
> Sad friend, you cannot change.

The last two lines contain almost the whole of Bishop's philosophy: the endless and at times beneficent possibilities of nature placed in sharp—here, tragic—contrast with our own great need, frailty, and finiteness.

But to mention Lowell in connection with Bishop risks obscuring her unique gifts, not least because of the deep affinities between their work. Lowell was one of the dominating public poets of his day. Bishop remained for years, as James Merrill said, a "poet's poet's poet." But if she never wore the poetic-political laurels Lowell did, and if her poems notably lack the grandiloquence and visible nervous strain that sometimes seem a prerequisite of literary recognition, the lightness, clarity, and hardness of both her diction and her imagery have garnered her a devoted following.

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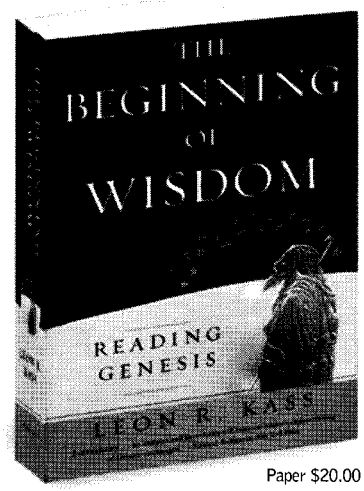

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Which is why so much excitement attended the announcement of a forthcoming volume of her unpublished poems, now available as *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box*.

Working from materials housed in the Vassar College library, Alice Quinn, the poetry editor of the *New Yorker*, has produced a scrupulous book, complete with a brief section of juvenilia, facsimiles of Bishop's typed and handwritten drafts, a copious appendix and end notes, and a whole chapter showing the evolution, in stages, of the poem "One Art." Quinn has arranged *Edgar Allan Poe* in rough chronological order, dividing it into four unequal blocks of years: 1929-36, 1937-50, 1951-67, 1968-79. Individual poems within these blocks go undated—many of Bishop's own drafts lack specific dates—but, thanks to Quinn's editorial discrimination, the sections cohere.

The Bishop already well known to her readers is abundantly present here. Gleaming, lapidary poems, the hallmark of her published work, fill particularly the first two sections, covering the years in which she wrote most of the poems that make up *North and South* (1946) and *A Cold Spring* (1955). Indeed, *Edgar Allan Poe* contains poems that an artist less demanding than Bishop would have not merely published but brandished as triumphs.

As clearly as would a close reading of her complete works, the book also enables us to trace Bishop's development, the rhetorical intensity of her earlier poems ripening into a painterly stillness. Thus, "Salem Willows," from the book's final section, is an invocation of *genius loci* as compressed and vivid as "Santarem," "Under the Window: Ouro Preto," or Bishop's other late poems of Brazil. This seamlessness testifies to the fact that the succinctness of her body of work does not stem from a lifelong series of private false starts.

But the volume is also not without its problems, resident in the nature of the material from which it has been assembled. Helen Vendler, writing in the *New Republic*, suggests that these incomplete, sometimes greatly flawed, and occasionally banal works should never have been brought to light. That is taking things too far. The least of these "repudiated poems" (in Vendler's acid phrase) can aid in understanding of Bishop's aims, and the best stand as worthy objects in their own right.

Still, Vendler's point has undeniable weight. One of the most tantalizing entries in *Edgar Allan Poe* is "Aubade and Elegy," a poem on Soares's death that Bishop worked on for years without managing to complete:

> No coffee can wake you no
> coffee can wake you no coffee
> No revolution can catch your
> attention
> You are bored with us all. It
> is true we ~~were~~ boring.
>
> For perhaps the enth time the
> tenth time the tenth time today
> and still early morning I go
> under the crashing wave
> of ~~your~~ death . . .

The hypnotic, repetitive rhythm of these lines suggests at once the inescapable facticity of death and a mourner's keening grief; the sporadic punctuation, the erasures and strikethroughs, the gaps and extra spaces evoke a kind of terror. But is it the lines as quoted, or their incompleteness, that accounts for their power? This is impossible to say.

"Aubade and Elegy" is an extreme example, but there are a number of other striking works here—"Rainy Day, Rio," for example, and "Something I've Meant to Write About for 30 Years"—that present the same problem: we have no idea how close to being finished they were, and not even Quinn's exhaustive notes can settle the question. Literary judgment, subjective enough at the best of times, becomes almost comically uncertain in the face of such incompleteness. If we were dealing with a lesser poet or a less sympathetic editor, that in itself might have been enough to vitiate the whole enterprise. Luckily, neither is the case here.

WHEN AN author's unpublished work comes to light, an expectation inevitably arises that roads never fully taken will reveal themselves. Quinn's book suggests at least one. The spastic rhythms of "The Gentleman of Shalott," a poem in the voice of a man bisected by a mirror, and a number of bizarre, miniaturist prose pieces on freakish animals, published but uncollected in her lifetime, hint at her fascination with harsh juxtapositions and surreal perspectives. The presence in *Edgar Allan Poe* of a number of similarly constructed poems, fragmentary though they are, confirm that these were not mere dalliances for Bishop but an essential part of her idea of poetry.

The book takes its title from a poem written in her late twenties or early thirties, a hellish meditation on the strife between mind and body: "the helpless earthward fall of love/descending from the hands and eye/down to the hands, and heart, and down. . . ." The theme is hardly atypical, but the poem's driving, broken tetrameters (and the mephitic light and sound provided by the jukebox) are something of a departure. Since this poem, too, ends in an ellipsis, one has difficulty placing it, exactly. But, incomplete as it is, it speaks as powerfully for Bishop's talent as do any of her canonical works.

Given the amount of energy devoted to the painstaking excavation of the works and lives of lesser American poets, any reader of Bishop, and any lover of American literature, has reason to be grateful for this book.

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Acquiring wealth the old-fashioned way

China is now said to be lifting a million people a month out of poverty. You can bet the rent money that the Left will show little interest in how China is managing this feat. The Left showed far more interest in China back when it was run by Mao in far-left fashion–and when millions of Chinese were starving.

Those of us who are not on the Left ought to take a closer look. After the death of Mao, government controls over the market began to relax–first tentatively, in select places and for select industries. Then, as those places and those industries began to prosper dramatically, similar relaxations of government control took place elsewhere, with similar results.

The Chinese acquired wealth the old-fashioned way: They created it.

—Thomas Sowell

How Tehran Can Yet Be Tamed

Washington should exploit the power struggle now taking place in Iran

On the surface, the regime in Tehran seems to stand together. Behind the scenes, however, a fierce struggle is under way. In one camp are Ahmadinejad and his supporters. In the other, Iran's embattled democratic movement and an array of forces that benefited from the status quo before Ahmadinejad came to power.

How can the United States exploit this struggle?

First, it should isolate Ahmadinejad and his cabal. Second, it should stimulate a serious discussion in Iranian society about the country's security interests. So far the regime has monopolized the discussion. This must end. And third, Bush should endorse the creation of a regional security organization in the Middle East. The more secure Iranians feel, the more likely the emergence of a peaceful, democratic movement.

—Michael McFaul and Abbas Milani

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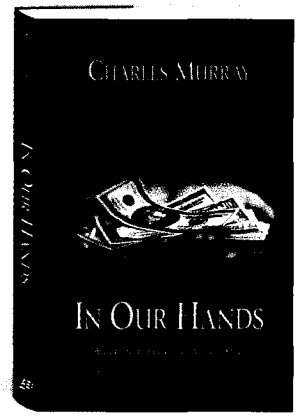

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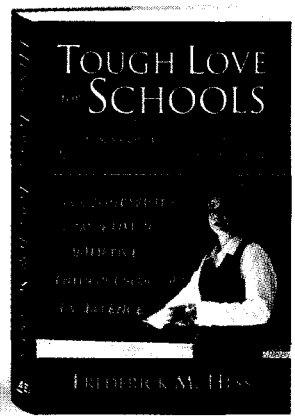

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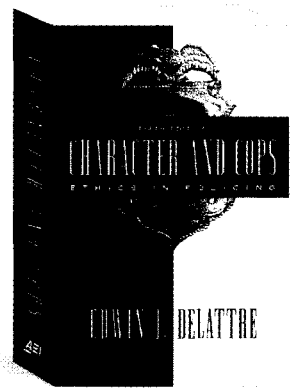

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